







**RUSSIAN CLOSE-UP**





# RUSSIAN CLOSE-UP



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1932

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*To*  
*Sofka*



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## *Preface*

ANYBODY who has just left Russia knows the impossibility of condensing his impressions. He has probably seen much that is favourable, and much that is not. He lacks all perspective. I had hoped that this would be different in the course of the few weeks that followed my return. But time is a sword that has a double edge. Former opinions may crystallise and become more solid. Meanwhile the world has changed, and this is nowhere more evident than it is in Russia. Many aspects of yesterday's policy have been discarded to-day, and this is a truth that concerns itself not with years and months, but with weeks, and even with days. However, the problem is not one of time alone; there is the even greater one of space. No opinions of Russia can be called valid unless they are comprehensive. They must not confine themselves to any one aspect of the situation, nor to any one portion of Russia's surface. Unless they represent the whole, the conclu-



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sions are inevitably misleading. In other words, the writer on Soviet Russia should make a closer union between time and space in politics than even Einstein has succeeded in effecting for physics.

I cannot claim to possess any of these qualifications. As I write, it is nearly half a year since I returned from Russia, and the part I visited was only a minute fraction of the country. In particular, I was unable to visit any of the large new industrial centres that have been established under the provisions of the Five-Year Plan. But I should like to pay tribute to many Americans whom I met in the course of my journey. Some of them had travelled for months, and were continuing to explore the country with praiseworthy thoroughness. Nobody can have any doubt as to the value of the books they produce after their return to the United States. Those who seek the latest figures for working hours, wages, and industrial production, or any other interesting statistics, are advised to read some of these books. There are many that I can heartily recommend, both for their conciseness in re-

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lating the whole history of the Revolution, and for their explanations of current Soviet policy in all its bearings. All that is outside the scope of this book.

At the same time, those who look merely for sensation or for the confirmation of any strong prejudices, are advised to turn elsewhere. This book has nothing to offer them. It is not intended to support either one side or the other in the great controversy, but has been written in the firm belief that misunderstandings between nations can only be avoided if greater contacts are established. These must be made as freely and as often as possible. Much has already been accomplished in this respect, but the goal of international cooperation seems ever to recede. Only recently a considerable stir was caused in London by the arrival of several hundred Soviet workers, who had received instructions not to speak to anybody. This was a certain advancement on previous methods, but it obviously does not go far enough to promote any real understanding. The same is true in Russia itself. The censorship of the Press has been rigorously enforced, and the whole popula-

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tion has been kept in complete ignorance of the true state of affairs outside their own country. It is to be hoped that the Bolsheviks will soon see fit to relinquish this pressure.

But Soviet Russia is not alone at fault. There still remains a large section of opinion in Europe and elsewhere that will not hear the name of the Bolsheviks even mentioned, except for the purpose of pouring out abuse. Yet now that their power is clearly established it may well be asked what advantage is to be gained by turning our backs upon them, and whether we are entitled to disregard the lives of over a hundred and sixty millions of the human race. As an ideal such a course is lamentable, and as a system of practical politics it is positively dangerous. Even admitted that the communists stand for the destruction of the capitalist world, no good can come out of a policy that merely tends to unite them to face the foes surrounding them on all sides. On the other hand, there seem to be a great many questions upon which some understanding might be reached if only true cooperation could be attained.

This book is not meant to throw any fresh

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light on any of the burning problems that confront the statesmen of to-day. My sojourn in Russia lasted only twelve and a half days, and that is far too short a time to collect any useful information. It is intended, however, to be a simple narrative of the journey, with descriptions of a few common scenes that may be encountered every day in Russia. It is greatly hoped that many people will undertake a similar journey, for the reason that I have already stated. If anybody still asks what motive can induce a person to travel in such a distant land, I should like to quote a passage from Gogol, my favourite Russian author. The translation is by Constance Garnett:

“Long ago in the days of my youth, in the days of my childhood, now vanished for ever, I used to enjoy going for the first time to an unknown place; it made no difference to me whether it were a little village, a poor wretched district town, a hamlet or a suburb, my inquisitive childish eyes discovered much that was of interest in it.”



## PART I



## PART I

### LENINGRAD

I HAVE repeatedly been asked whether life in Russia, as I saw it during a short visit this summer, was just the same as I expected to find it. I am forced to admit that I no longer have any clear recollection of what I did expect. Not only did I leave England before the tremendous controversy about Russia began, but I spent the intervening time in Switzerland, where the very existence of Soviet Russia is ignored. Nowadays, many people in this country claim to be perfectly familiar with every phase of Russian life. But at that time my knowledge was confined to certain books, written chiefly by American authors. Yet, however clear a picture anyone may form before he goes there, it is certain that the impressions gained by a visit are so strong that they utterly annihilate that picture, and leave it beyond recall.

I left Berlin at the beginning of May and went by train through the Baltic States. Riga now swarms with journalists of all the nations,



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and there are probably very few events in that part of Europe that do not find their way into the Press. Small states have assumed a vast importance since the war, and the Baltic States are particularly proud of their newly won independence. At every frontier station officials appear in the most brightly coloured uniforms. There seem to be so many ranks that no two uniforms resemble each other.

The following incident will show the mental confusion into which such a maze of colour can throw the uninitiated traveller. We had stopped at some frontier station, and, glad to be out of the train, I walked out onto the platform. Most of the officials were gathered in groups, talking languidly to one another, but one man stood alone, a little way apart from the rest. His uniform was far less brilliant than most, and even seemed vaguely familiar. I went up to him and tried to get him to talk. He listened to me attentively, but merely shook his head at every remark I made. Each language I tried produced the same result. Then it was that a strange madness came upon me. Centuries ago the Mongolian hordes had swept over that part of Europe,

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and their descendants occupy a large portion of Lithuania. For the moment I forgot the intervening centuries, forgot that race and language can be utterly distinct, forgot everything and tried to speak to the man in Chinese—in what I believed had been the tongue of his forefathers. No man could have looked less Chinese, yet he had failed to respond to any other language. I felt sure he must speak *something*. Perhaps the speech of his dim origin might evoke some answering chord in his mind. . . . He had listened patiently up to now, but on hearing the curious Chinese sounds I made, purposely exaggerated so as to leave no room for doubt, that patience seemed to snap. In perfect English he told me that he had not understood a word I had been saying, but that if I had anything really important to communicate would I come to his compartment where there was a small dictionary, and we might reach some understanding. The fact of having spoken foreign languages to an Englishman did not greatly annoy me. That often happens abroad. But what made me feel really foolish was the fact that I had failed to distinguish, from amidst the

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bewilderment of colours, the ubiquitous uniform of the Salvation Army.

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Nevertheless, it may be asked whether this independence has not been accompanied by a great material loss. Industries have lost their markets, and the door to the interior of Russia is now closed. Even the much-vaunted independence is perhaps only one in name. In actual fact, the Baltic States are not strong enough to resist the wishes of Russia. The Soviet Government can always reduce either Esthonia or Latvia to submission by transferring the whole of its transit trade to the other. The situation is not improved by the suspected presence of counter-revolutionaries. Actually, the Governments of the Baltic States have never favoured these plotters. A restoration of the Tsarist regime would have meant the loss of independence, which these states value even more highly than forms of government. Nevertheless, the mere fact that suspected persons are harboured has been a

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cause of friction. The responsibility of being an outpost of capitalism seems to be keenly felt in this part of Europe. Yet the fact that Riga itself is not prospering, and that its population is decreasing, has caused an ever-growing uneasiness.

I was greatly impressed by the length of the journey from Riga to Leningrad. I had vaguely imagined that the minute fragment that had been severed from the former Tsarist Empire could be crossed in a few hours. To my amazement it took fully twenty-four. The enormous distances that one travels are certainly a very impressive, if not the most impressive, fact upon a first visit to Russia.

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I reached the frontier station of Ostrov in the early morning. There has been much exaggeration about the search that is made at the customs-house. What actually happens is that every piece of luggage is methodically emptied and then refilled. A receipt is given for all

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foreign money that is brought into the country. I should advise anyone going there to be very careful to keep this receipt and every chit that is given to him when he changes money in Russia. An American with whom I returned was unable to produce the necessary documents, and nearly had to return with a quantity of paper roubles, which he would never have been able to change. The customs officials perform their task in an orderly way. If any unpleasantness occurs, it is almost certainly the fault of the traveller. I saw a German make a violent scene in the customs-house. He made a fresh outburst as each separate article was removed from his bag. But his protests were of no avail. If he had been employed by the officials in order to elicit sympathy from the rest of us in their disagreeable task, he could not have played the part better.

I travelled "soft" in the Soviet train. This is luxurious. The compartments are either for two persons or for four. Each person has a whole side to himself, and can obtain a blanket from the attendant. On this particular occasion I found myself alone with a well-dressed officer.

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I have a good knowledge of Russian, but my efforts at conversation in this case were fruitless. When we came to Pskov, the officer left. I could quote many instances from Russian literature to show the great respect that was always felt for a general in Tsarist Russia. With a certain thrill I received the information from the train attendant that I had been travelling with a very great man: a general in the Soviet Flying Corps. It seemed to me then that here was a link with the past that the mere name of equality had not succeeded in eradicating. However, I had no time to consider this further, as we only had just over an hour in which to visit Pskov.

My first impression of an entire town in extreme poverty is one that I am never likely to forget. Here again there has been much exaggeration. There were no signs of actual starvation, and the very long-suffering people seemed able to endure it. Nevertheless, the sight of the whole population of a town living in rags and having only the barest necessities of life is far different from that of the poorest slums in any ordinary capital.

Opposite the station were about fifteen cabs

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in the most utter disrepair, with horses that more resembled skeletons. I approached the cab-drivers with a certain diffidence. Having not yet succeeded in talking to anybody besides the train attendant and the customs officials, I was a bit dubious about the reception that might be accorded to a foreigner. This was soon shaken off. The first cab-driver to whom I spoke was extremely friendly, and I have always found this to be a genuine characteristic of the whole Russian people. He offered to show me the town for eight roubles.<sup>1</sup> I naturally refused, not without a certain fear lest a scene should occur in which I should have to face the angry protests of fifteen cab-drivers. Nothing of the sort happened. He smilingly shrugged his shoulders, as if in recognition of the fact that we were all poor now. He never offered to reduce his charge. I do not know yet whether this was from pride or because of an arrangement with his colleagues. I read later in the official Soviet

<sup>1</sup> I had obtained about eight roubles at the frontier station for the equivalent in American dollars of one pound sterling. The exchange, of course, varied considerably at that time, and it is greatly to be hoped that stabilisation will be secured at an early date.

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Guide Book that cab-drivers should be paid twenty to thirty per cent. of the price they ask. But as I had been repeatedly warned beforehand that I must on no account take a cab in Russia, unless I wanted to throw away money, I left this problem unanswered.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime my new acquaintance began to show considerable interest in my visit. He asked me numerous questions about where I had come from and what I thought of Russia. He asked me whether I had ever seen anything like the rags he was wearing. Much has been said of the "unconscious sacrifice" of the Russian people. I take this to mean that many Russians are unaware of the conditions in the outside world, and imagine that their own situation is actually better than that of "decadent Europe". I certainly believe that many do think this. The censorship of the Press has removed all possibility of contact with any

<sup>1</sup> Since writing this book I have read *I Went to Russia*. I had not realised before that the cab-drivers were regarded as such harmful enemies by the new authorities. Mr. Liam O'Flaherty shows that the Soviet attack on them is part of a gigantic scheme to "liquidate" cab-drivers throughout the Union. I now understand the passage in the Guide Book which puzzled me at the time.



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other conditions than their own. Nevertheless, there are some who seem to be painfully conscious of the real comparison. My first acquaintance in Russia was an example. And yet he was one of those men who can take any privation cheerfully.

By this time a crowd was collecting around us and joining in the conversation. They were a very friendly crowd. It is true that among them were some faces that were as vacant as any I have ever seen. This applies chiefly to the older men. There were faces that just stared and nodded, as though this world were merely a dream and had no importance whatever. Still more disturbing, perhaps, were the faces that simply stared, and, when I addressed a remark to them, continued to stare, as though one of us did not exist. But the younger people showed a lively interest, and began to talk about some Germans who had recently visited the town. Not far away were some traders. They were sitting by the roadside selling eggs and milk for ordinary cash. Some of them now began to approach us. When the crowd had swelled to about thirty, I decided that it was

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time to move off. A foreigner soon gets used to collecting a huge crowd round him in any small town or village in Russia. To me this was a very agreeable surprise. But its occurrence within a few minutes of my arrival caused me a certain uneasiness, as I had no wish to incur the suspicion of the authorities. I slipped away and walked off down the long and dusty road towards the town of Pskov. Occasionally I looked round and always saw the faces of the old men following me with a perfectly motionless stare.

The town is situated about twenty minutes' walk from the station. This did not give me much time. But it is hard to exaggerate the interest of those first few minutes in Soviet Russia. I was fortunately not handicapped by too much knowledge about Russian life. I could go into a cooperative store without previously knowing exactly what I should find there for sale. I usually saw the most ordinary articles, such as boot-laces and studs. But the prices were very high. It is hardly necessary to add that the artificial exchange makes the cost of living in Russia exorbitantly high for a foreigner.

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Also, even the prices generally asked are cash prices. A worker who produces a card, issued to him every week, is able to buy his goods for about a third of the ordinary cash price.

The rest of the time in Pskov I spent visiting a very small church. An old woman was sitting at the door, but paid no attention when I tried to talk to her. A stranger is not unpopular in Russia, but is treated with the utmost suspicion in any church. My failure to perform the ordinary ceremonies upon entering an Orthodox church clearly made matters worse. Just as I was trying to assure the old woman that my intentions were harmless, the priest arrived. He looked so pained and terrified at my presence that I apologised hurriedly and fled.

I returned to my compartment in the train and found that the vacant place had now been occupied by a Red Army Man. Officers are known as "commanders" in order to avoid any suggestion of class distinction. Fortunately, I had a liberal supply of American cigarettes, and was able to make friends in a very few minutes. I soon discovered that the commander had travelled widely all over Russia. He

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explained to me the system of patronisation, by which a Red Army Man is allotted to each village and undertakes to develop the communist spirit there. Needless to say, the Red Army Men are chosen with the utmost care. They may do any sort of jobs, and more especially concentrate their attention on education, and on the organisation of peasant life. The advantages of this system are obvious. The central authority is kept in close contact with every country district. My new acquaintance seemed fully qualified to carry out this task. He was every inch a communist. That is to say that he quite evidently subscribed to every communist principle through sincere conviction. At the same time he had received a good education. He was able to discuss Russian literature with keen interest, and knew something of foreign classics, though not in the original language. I found him reading a translation of some of the works of Bret Harte. I asked him to lend me a book and he gave me the latest official trial. I read this for the rest of the journey, and he explained to me any points that I failed to understand. He had read every

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trial, just as the ordinary Englishman reads the latest Test Match score.

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We reached Leningrad about six o'clock in the evening. A city entirely composed of working men and women may perhaps be pictured easily enough. But it seemed to me that there was a further distinction to be drawn between these crowds and those in any ordinary European city. They seemed to walk and think together. The people one meets at a street-corner listening to some loud-speaker shrieking out the latest lesson in industrial organisation; the people that collect outside the Winter Palace to see the reconstruction; even the crowds that wait in the streets for the very occasional trams, are not mere collections of stray individuals. They may push, scramble, and curse. They may dislike each other for many reasons. But every member of a Boat Race crowd does not back the same side. In a crowd of Russian workers there always seems

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to be some common bond. For them every day is Boat Race Day.

From the station I went straight to the October Hotel. There I met a few Americans, who were going out that evening to a Russian ballet at the Academic Theatre of Russian Opera. I went with them. I sat between two men who said they had naturalised in the United States about 1905, and had been born in Russia some time in the 90's. They spoke a few words in a very strong American accent, but seemed quite unable to understand my somewhat milder diction. One of them leant across me and spoke to the other in Russian. I then discovered that they had lived in America for about twenty-five years without ever having learnt the language. We spoke for the rest of the evening in Russian. I was surprised to find that every single foreigner I met in Russia, apart from two Germans, could speak the language fluently. I had always been told that the Soviet Government refused to grant a visa to anybody who could speak Russian. If a rule is proved by the quantity of exceptions, then this rule must be regarded as proved beyond all shadow of doubt.

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The theatre was one of the largest that I have ever seen. We sat at the back of the stalls and watched the performance through opera-glasses. On this first evening it was difficult not to be surprised at seeing hardly a man in the audience who was wearing a collar and tie, or even a stud. But it was during the interval that the theatre really seemed to have lost its former glory. There in the large room, where Russian Society had been wont to parade in gorgeous evening dresses, now was nothing but a scramble for tea and refreshments, and very much spilling thereof.

This ballet was my first experience of communist propaganda on the stage, though I had often seen it on the screen. It was obviously meant for people who had been working all day and merely came to the theatre to rest, as nothing was left to the imagination of the spectators. The characters were grotesque and far more resembled the strange puppets and marionettes that amuse the children in the Champs-Élysées than anything that we usually associate with the stage. The villains naturally played a prominent part. They were caricatures of a

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militarist, a capitalist, a Hitlerite, and numerous policemen. Their entrance onto the stage was always accompanied by jarring notes from the orchestra.

The heroes were very active on the stage. They were young men and women dressed in blue with red handkerchiefs round their necks. They kept running out from behind corners and playing tricks on stupid but malicious policemen and Hitlerites. On one occasion an imperialist had a boxing match with a completely buck nigger. As the black man came onto the stage he passed in front of the militarist and capitalist, who both turned away in disgust. The audience hissed at this sign of colour prejudice. The two villains then gave the imperialist every sort of evil advice, and he finally chose a moment when the nigger was not looking, hit him in the back and knocked him out. The communist group then rushed onto the stage and assaulted the imperialist. He was feebly defended by all the villains. But the communists were victorious, as they always are on the stage, and the audience was well pleased.

Another item was that of the policemen. A



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communist worker, who was rousing his fellows to revolt, was chased by a large squad of policemen. Needless to say, the young worker proved far too clever for them, and succeeded in making a complete fool of the constable who was in charge. In order to regain his dignity the latter decided to have his own back on his men. He lined them up in one long row and then knocked them each down in turn with a heavy blow. As each one fell, my companion on the right gave a yell of delight. A sense of humour is an indispensable asset in Russia. My companion did not seem to possess it. And yet on this occasion he laughed heartily. The rest of the audience merely signified approval.

The only other item of interest was some propaganda in favour of sport. This was done by amateur actors who were members of a sports club. Team games were naturally the only display. A football match was played to music with an imaginary ball. To anyone who has seen football played, the whole of this item must have appeared very childish. But the majority of that audience had probably never heard of the game, and in view of that the

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performance was admirable. Sport is very much encouraged in Russia now, contrary to the belief held by some people that it has been abolished altogether. One of the Americans in the party had been there some time, and had taken an active part in sport. He said that the communists would allow any foreigner to play with them "as long as they see that you're made of the right stuff". He used to shoot with them often. This is an individualistic sport, but it clearly has advantages which outweigh that blemish in the eyes of the communists. In general, team games only are encouraged.

After the theatre we returned to the hotel and had supper. I was given a collection of green tickets, each one being dated. There were three for each day, enabling me to have breakfast, lunch and dinner. There was no set time for these meals. Thus, a lunch ticket may be produced at eleven o'clock in the morning, and, provided the date is correct, lunch is forthcoming. On the other hand, if one returns late in the evening from a day in the country, lunch may be had at seven or eight o'clock. It cannot be said that the meals arrive immediately. It

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not infrequently happens that one has to wait as much as two hours. If the green ticket is lost, great difficulties arise.

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The next morning I took a 'bus to Dyetskoe Syelo, where I saw the palaces of the Tsars. These have been kept in good condition and attract an unceasing flow of visitors, in spite of the fact that they are situated at a considerable distance from Leningrad. Expert guides are ready to point out any detail that may be missed by the unwary stranger, and are particularly anxious to discuss the wider issues. We saw over the private chapel of Catherine the Great. An American tourist asked a few questions about the total weight of all the gold and its value in dollars. The guide made an elaborate answer, attacking the Orthodox Church in general, and trying to convince us that the luxury inside this chapel was quite inconsistent with true religion. Even the most determined atheists in Russia are careful to distinguish

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between the good and the bad in religious sentiment.

I have visited many palaces and museums in Europe, but I had quite a different impression when I did so in Russia. Here every single room that we saw was intended to convey some lesson. The political issue completely subordinates the purely historical interest. I have already mentioned the anti-religious lecture in the chapel. This was typical of the whole tour. In the study of Nicholas II we were shown his numerous books on military subjects, and the obvious deduction was drawn from this. I do not remember seeing any room or object that did not have some bearing on the Revolution. Any article of luxury was said to have been possessed at the expense of the suffering people. Any musical instrument or sporting weapon merely showed how the Tsars had wasted their time and neglected the duties of state. The guides have an amazing knowledge and have to pass a very stiff examination. They have to know all the faults and mistakes of every Tsar in Russian history.

The visit took most of the day. On the way

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back we were able to look over a children's sanatorium. This did not differ greatly from any other. There was only one curious point of interest, namely, the quantity of pictures illustrating the progress under the Five-Year Plan, not only in every room, but also all over the staircase. These certainly provide an atmosphere of energy. I expect people get used to them after a few days, and hardly notice them. But I should be very interested to discover some time what would be the effect of this exciting stimulus upon a new patient stricken with disease. It might not be entirely beneficial.

I returned to the hotel in Leningrad late in the afternoon, and spent some time reading newspapers. It is significant that the scene of interest in Russian newspapers frequently changes from internal to foreign affairs and then back again to internal. At this time the Soviet Government was still devoting every energy to making the Five-Year Plan a big success. The leading article in the *Izvestia* was always concerned with some question of industrialisation. It is wrong to say that no criticism is allowed in Russia. There is a great deal of it.

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The organisation of the cooperatives is made the object of the most violent attack, and efforts are made to expose every flaw in the present system. What is not allowed is any criticism of the ultimate end of the communist state. The means may be wrong, and the common interest requires that they should not remain so. But the ideal is considered beyond reproach.

In the evening I went to a cinema. The film was a great achievement. The only remarkable feature was the complete absence of any plot. There was a vague suggestion of a hero and a heroine, but the purpose of the film was to show the cruelty that had been inflicted on the peasants in the eighteenth century. One man was tied to a tree on a cold wintry day, and buckets of water were thrown at him and froze on him, till he was completely covered by a solid block of ice. The whole film was composed of such scenes. There was no love element, but only the usual propaganda in favour of Revolution.

Another impression on this first day of my visit was the great number of soldiers and the quantity of artillery. I have often been asked

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whether I saw many signs of militarism in Russia. I saw enough on this first day to make anyone believe that there must be a war on. But allowance must here be made for certain very special conditions. The greater part of the Russian Army is concentrated in the West. If it were spread out proportionately over the vast area of Russia, then soldiers would be far less in evidence. Also, they mingle with the rest of the population in Russia in a way that they do not in any other country. "It's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Tommy, 'ow's yer soul!'" could never be applied to the Russian soldier. He regards himself rather as a specially privileged civilian, who knows and does more than anybody else. He does not spend much of his time in barracks, but is to be seen in every large street, in every public garden, and at every place of entertainment. Sometimes, in a park, I would see more soldiers than civilians. This, naturally, gives the impression that they are very numerous indeed. But I intend to return to this subject later.

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The next morning I spent visiting art galleries. The Hermitage has probably one of the finest collections of paintings in the world. There is also a museum of Russian paintings in Leningrad. There were many parties being taken round by guides. It was interesting to see how much political propaganda may be brought into an ordinary tour through a picture gallery. Whenever a Tsar or richly dressed noble appears, it is explained that their wealth was only gained at the expense of the over-taxed masses. A picture of a peasant is teeming with interest. If he looks cheerful, this is held to prove the deceitfulness of the painter. It is even hinted that he may have been bribed or that he was trying to improve his position at Court. If, on the other hand, the peasant looks downcast and starved, the case is proved.

In the Russian museum there is a large collection of post-revolutionary art. Here every device is used to portray the vices of the capitalist and the victory of the Bolsheviks. This art is not confined to museums, but may be seen in some of the gigantic erections that adorn the public squares in the larger cities.



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is so different from any other that it is not always appreciated at first sight. The figures do not represent people as they are likely to be seen in everyday life, but are symbolical of their activities. I found one good example in Leningrad. There was a large model of a battleship, belonging, presumably, to some Imperialist Power. A fat capitalist was sheltering behind this and stretching out his arms to crush the life out of some small workers. But three enormous Red Army Men stood up to defend the otherwise helpless workers. These three figures were many times the size of an ordinary man, and gave the suggestion of towering and irresistible strength.

This sort of art is greatly encouraged in all schools. Some of the best cartoons drawn by Young Communists have the honour of being pinned up on the notice-boards, and there is often a little story or poem written underneath. Generally a good knowledge of the history of the revolution is required in order to understand what the pictures mean. Even then some explanations are often necessary. The figures are always very simple, and are usually of one

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colour. Much has obviously been learnt from the French Impressionists.

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I have often been asked whether it is possible to go anywhere alone in Russia. On the second day in Leningrad I had some time to spare and decided to walk through the town. I wanted to find a house where a friend of mine had formerly lived. All the streets have now got different names. However, to my surprise, everybody seemed to know the street I mentioned, though I had not discovered its new name. I had to ask the way several times in the street. Everybody was willing to direct me, but never failed to ask what number I wanted, and often whom I was going to visit. The Russian people are by nature inquisitive. It certainly is very difficult to distinguish between curiosity and suspicion, especially when one expects the latter. My search for the relatives of my friend was fruitless. I had been told that they were regular attendants at a small church almost opposite

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the house. I went in there and asked for information from an old woman sitting near the door and from a still more aged priest. Directly I mentioned the name it was clear that they could have told me all I wanted to know. But their lips were sealed, and not one syllable would they utter. I was able to engage them in conversation on other topics, and tried to convince them of my harmlessness. But whenever I returned to the subject of my friends' relations the same stony silence ensued. I did not press the priest for further information, as this would not have been fair. It would have amounted to asking him to risk being shut up in a Bolshevik prison for the sake of a perfect stranger. Even if the priest knew that I was not a spy there was always the chance that I might involve his friends in danger by visiting them.

I had a vague recollection that the number of the house was forty-two. I went under an archway into a small backyard. There were several doors and a stone staircase leading up to other flats in the house. As I was wondering which door to try, a cab-driver came out and walked across the yard. It was still very early

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in the morning, but the man was drunk. Vodka had served to loosen his tongue, and he was reviling the Bolsheviks. I was careful to avoid his notice, and stood in a doorway to watch him pass. I could not understand much that he was saying, but he seemed to be recalling days when there was not so much dirt in Leningrad. In particular, a pool of muddy water in the middle of the yard angered him intensely. He made a thrust at it with his long whip. Then he spat into it, and staggered out through the archway into the street. This did not help to clear the yard, but no doubt eased his feelings. When a Russian cab-driver spits, it generally means that he is very annoyed.

A few days later, when I was in Moscow, I told a friend that I had seen more signs of discontent in Leningrad than I saw in Moscow. My friend inquired by what standard I was able to test the temper of the populace. He had been living there for several years, and said that it was very difficult to start a political discussion in Russia, as people preferred to be reserved in their attitude. He warned me not to judge them by outward appearances, as this

## Russian Close-Up

was no indication of what lay below the surface. I said that I had seen a greater quantity of expectorations in Leningrad, and that their quality was altogether more vigorous than in Moscow.

As soon as the cab-driver was out of sight round the corner, I emerged from the doorway. I still hesitated about knocking at a door. I knew that if I had the misfortune to be met by a communist agent my inquiry might cause the relations of my friend some unpleasantness. As I waited, a young woman came out of a doorway carrying a basket. She had a sorrowful face, and I was convinced that she must be harmless. I mentioned the name. She merely shrugged her shoulders and walked on across the yard. I felt that it was now useless to renew the attempt, and I returned to my hotel.

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There were many places of interest in Leningrad. From the architectural point of view I was most impressed by the Kasansky Cathe-

## Part One

dral. This has now been turned into an anti-religious museum. Much has already been written about this movement in Russia and it is very doubtful whether anything is gained by constant repetition. Perhaps it is not always realised that the revolutionaries directed their attacks far more against particular Russian priests whom they knew and hated than against all religions in general. These priests had become closely identified with the machinery of the State, and never failed to assist in suppressing the Revolution. The communist attack on religion has its origin in this hatred against the priests, and the rest is only a later development.

My guide in Leningrad was a young woman from the Intourist Agency. As we were passing a House of Culture I asked if I might be shown round it. My guide demurred, and did not seem to think that I should be allowed in. I expressed my horror at this exclusiveness, and was immediately admitted without another word. I should advise any visitor to the U.S.S.R. who wishes to enter any particular building to approach the matter in that way. Clearly, if

## Russian Close-Up

only certain persons are allowed to go in, the whole ideal is shattered. The logic of this is irrefutable.

The House of Culture was a place of recreation and intellectual development for all who chose to enter. It was open for most of the day, but it was not usual for many people to arrive before six or seven o'clock. Most of them came straight from the factory. There was a large play-room where children might be left, if the parents brought any, so that they were able to entertain themselves in another part of the building. There were a few games to be played, including chess and draughts. The guardian of the House was in the middle of a game when we arrived. But most of the rooms were devoted to a more serious form of culture. There was a library with a considerable number of books, though all of them concerned industrialisation. There was also a lecture-room upstairs. I found this fairly crowded and listened to the speaker for a few minutes. Once again the topic was industrialisation. At the back of the building was a theatre, where I found a very large audience. An anti-religious play of the propa-

## Part One

gandist type was being performed. I was very much impressed by the number of people I found engaged in the different pursuits which this building promoted. All the entertainment was quite free. No charge whatever was made for the use of the library, for admittance to the lecture, or for watching the play. Nevertheless, the House did not provide any form of recreation that was not directed towards the development of the communist spirit. That seriously limited its scope.

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That night I took the train to Moscow. Once again I travelled "soft", but this time I was in a compartment for four persons. The other occupants were two commanders and a girl. It is often supposed that the Red Army Men will not talk to a foreigner. This was certainly not my experience. I imagine that the legend arose from the belief that a Russian soldier, being such an ardent communist, is about as ready to establish any contact with a foreigner as is the



## Russian Close-Up

plus end of a battery with the minus end. Conversely, it is supposed that anyone who is displeased with the present regime would be anxious to welcome a foreigner. The reverse is the case. Those whose political views are not above suspicion would never venture to discuss any vital issue with a foreigner. They have learnt that this is fraught with danger, and will not speak to one without the greatest caution. Soldiers, on the other hand, have less to fear. It is true they risk severer punishment. Nevertheless, they are so well versed in communist doctrines that they are less likely to commit any error. But there is a further reason for their eagerness to talk. They are so convinced of the ultimate victory of their cause that they fear no arguments. They are even ready to state the case against themselves with that perfect self-confidence which comes from a supposed knowledge of all that matters in life, and from a due realisation of the difficulty of the task that lies before them. They believe that the course of events is fully justifying their faith, and that no foreigner can fail to be impressed by the perfection of their ideal. Under these circumstances

## Part One

it is they, the communist soldiers, who are ready to talk; and it is the discontented who are reserved and silent.

I still had some American cigarettes left. Owing to the exchange value of the rouble, American commodities can only be purchased at stupendous prices in Russia. Consequently, my cigarettes were more than welcome. We talked nearly all the night, and our conversation ranged from the latest developments in internal organisation in town and country to the widest issues in Western civilisation and events in the Far East. I was greatly impressed by their knowledge of every phase of life in Soviet Russia. Soldiers certainly have the greatest opportunities for travelling and come in contact with every movement in Russia. I obtained much interesting information in this way. But the same cannot be said about their knowledge of foreign affairs. Just at this time events in Spain were attracting great attention. There was much talk in the Soviet papers of the possibility of a successful communist revolution. I asked the soldiers for their opinion on the matter, and was told that Spain is a long way from Russia

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and that events there can only be regarded as of secondary importance. The soldiers professed a far greater interest in China, but had never even heard the name of Borodin.

## PART II



## PART II

### MOSCOW

WE reached Moscow the next morning, and I got a room at the Grand Hotel. This is probably the best hotel in Moscow. It is very near the Kremlin, and is just beside the Red Square. Here is the tomb of Lenin, and the whole spirit of revolution hangs over this mecca of communism. Processions are constantly passing before the Grand Hotel, and Red Square is the scene of innumerable demonstrations. I had formerly always associated every demonstration with some specific grievance, such as cheaper bread, higher wages or votes for women. At first I was at a loss to understand the reason for the countless bands of men and women, and even of children, who carried the Red Flag and marched round the Red Square with every sign of enthusiasm. I almost felt inclined to ask them: did they not know that Bolshevism already existed in Russia? It seemed to me that the *raison d'être* of a purely Red demonstration had been removed. Then I gradually understood

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the truth that no communist revolution can be successful in a week or even in a year. It is not an event, but a process. It is wrong to say that the Bolsheviks gained any success in 1917. The Revolution is not an affair of the past, but of the present and future. Every day new conquests must be attempted. If ever a halt is made in order to entrench and fortify the position, then much of the ground that has been won must inevitably be lost. It is this atmosphere of constant energy that gives to every foreigner in Russia the impression of a nation in arms.

My first few days in Moscow were spent in visiting places of general interest. The Kremlin requires a whole morning, and only large organised parties may go over it. We were only admitted to that part of it which has been turned into a museum. The Government buildings are closed to visitors, so we contented ourselves with looking at the Tsar Bell and Tsar Cannon, and hearing all the old stories that many of us knew already by heart. We saw the coronation chapel, and the tomb of the murdered Dmitri and many other objects which

## Part Two

Pushkin has immortalised. But none of this can be appreciated to-day during a visit to the Kremlin. It is not the mere fact of going in an organised party and of being herded from place to place. There are also other crowds of tourists and bands of communist soldiers being taken round by shouting guides. All this destroys the atmosphere (often in more senses than one), and takes away all the pleasure. As we were going across the yard a lorry came straight at us. When it was within a few yards, the driver trod on the accelerator and charged us. We only just dispersed in time. It is a very common thing to see furious driving in Moscow. Nearly all motor vehicles are in the hands of shock brigades. They often carry placards and red banners. Those who sit at the wheel wave to groups of workers as they go past, and remind one of the spirit with which undergraduates drove 'buses and trams in London during the General Strike. But the incident in the square of the Kremlin was of a very different nature. We were not workers, but very obviously foreign visitors. The driver of the lorry, if he did not deliberately intend to kill us, certainly meant



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us no good. We came away with a distinctly nasty taste in our mouths.

What really restored my spirits that morning was the presence of Mr. Howland Bancroft of the U.S.A. He was a very jovial companion and showed a delightful sense of humour. I asked him to dine with me that evening. But here I have a confession to make. I had very little money, and I found that the cost of inviting a guest to dinner would be very great. In particular, the price of wine was exorbitant. Even a pint of beer could not be had for less than two and a half roubles, which meant about six shillings. Now it was a warm day, Mr. Bancroft was a very robust man, and was obviously tired. Even should he be content with beer, he would easily be capable of drinking two pints or more. Then he might like port, which would probably be another ten shillings for each of us. I shuddered at the thought. Then I discovered that a certain very cheap drink could be had under the name of "ginger-wine". I tried some for lunch. From a distance it might have been any form of cider. A short-sighted person might even have mistaken it for

## Part Two

champagne. But it had no sparkle, it was non-alcoholic, and its taste was very unpleasant. It did not quench the thirst, but made anybody who drank it long to leave the room and rinse his mouth. If there was any food on the table he would start eating hurriedly. I ordered a bottle of this beverage for dinner.

Mr. Bancroft arrived in great spirits. He obviously needed no cocktail to cheer him. He congratulated the waiter and myself upon the food. Then I pressed him to have some wine. I assured him that this particular brand was a speciality of the Grand Hotel, and that he could never return to America without having sampled such an exquisite drink. He assented, and I filled his glass to the brim. Mr. Bancroft now broke all the laws of hospitality by passing a distinctly adverse criticism on the wine. He said quite frankly that it was greatly inferior to anything he had ever drunk in his life up to that moment. I assured him that Prohibition had spoilt his taste. This started a long discussion on the famous Act. We both became very heated and had to drink heartily. Mr. Bancroft was persuaded to have another

## Russian Close-Up

glass, and I even succeeded in ordering another bottle, which, however, we were unable to finish.

Quite recently, since I returned to London, I received a telephone message asking me to dine with Mr. Bancroft at Grosvenor House. I found that he was unknown at that place. I rang up every one of the many hotels and restaurants whose name contains the word "Grosvenor". I never found him. Should these pages ever fall into the hands of any person who is acquainted with Mr. Howland Bancroft of the U.S.A., I should be very grateful for news of him. I will give you food and drink, Mr. Bancroft. You shall not be offered any more ginger-wine.

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Another interesting relic is the private house of the first Romanov. This has been well kept in its original condition. The only change that has been made is the decoration of a large part of the building with propaganda in favour

## Part Two

of the Five-Year Plan. The house of Tolstoy has been maintained in a very similar condition. One of the most valuable art collections in the world can be found in the Museum of Western Art, and the Tryetyekovskaya Gallery has the finest collection of Russian paintings.

On my first evening I went to the Academia of the Bolshoi Theatre and saw the Russian opera called *Tsarskaya Nevesta*. The audience seemed really to appreciate the artistic merits of this performance, which was good. This was the first piece I had seen that had any other subject than that of pure propaganda. I had the impression that Moscow differed very largely from Leningrad in this respect. It is not that they are less enthusiastic about the Revolution in Moscow, but that they are more so. In Leningrad there are many signs of discontent, but in Moscow all resistance has been so effectively crushed that the population has leisure to think of other things. The very heart of the Revolution seems to throb at Moscow, and yet the people have greater freedom for recreation. At Leningrad the worker never escapes from the

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incessant propaganda which haunts his sleeping and waking hours. At Moscow they have already got past that stage, and much more is taken for granted.

During my stay in Moscow I met many American workers, and used to have meals with them sometimes. They were chiefly technicians who were engaged by the Soviet Government to assist in the industrialisation. The "Third Decisive Year of the Plan" required the help of many foreign experts. It was interesting to hear their opinions of the Russians with whom they worked. On the whole, they liked them and admired their spirit. But they were not enthusiastic in their praises of the communists as engineers. They can be trained fairly easily to run an engine when it is new. But directly anything goes wrong with it the Russian worker cannot be relied upon to remedy the defect. Needless to say, the Americans showed great interest in the question of motor-cars. The new works that have been set up at Nijni-Novgorod will make a great difference to the motor industry. At present there are only some twenty or thirty thousand cars in Soviet

## Part TWO ~~THE~~ LAR JUNG LEE

Russia. It is hoped that the annual output will soon reach a hundred thousand. But there still remains the question of roads, which appear to be non-existent.

The Americans showed many signs of discontent. Since the aggravation of the situation in U.S.A. they have received far worse terms in Russia. Their salaries are not so high, and they are no longer granted the same facilities for returning to their own country. But there is a further reason for their attitude. Many of them were unemployed in the U.S.A. and came to Russia in search of a job without any clear idea of the conditions that awaited them. Some of them were inspired by the communist ideal and forsook good prospects at home. But Americans cannot easily dispense with material comforts. They are continually breaking away from the communist surroundings and setting up their own places of accommodation and recreation. I never had the impression that these Americans could possibly feel at home.

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## Russian Close-Up

I also made the acquaintance of a good many Europeans in Moscow. Some were visitors or tourists, but the majority were diplomats, newspaper correspondents or representatives of relief societies. The Russian situation is one that may be discussed endlessly. The papers contain innumerable facts and figures, and every person seems familiar with the progress of the task. The new arrival in Moscow easily falls into the trap of thinking that he knows all there is to know about it. The foreigner who has been there for ten years knows better than this. He has seen a constant change in the situation. At one time there is pure and simple communism. Then the N.E.P. introduces a form of capitalism. Then bonuses are granted to the most efficient workers and the payment of wages is made on a piece-rate. Nor is the fire of communist attack always directed towards the same enemy. At one time the foreign capitalist is threatened. Then all energies are concentrated on the internal situation. Here again it is sometimes the town and sometimes the country that suffers most. It is clear that conditions are changing from day to day in Soviet Russia.

## Part Two

/Only the most alert are able to keep in touch with the trend of events.

At the time I was in Moscow there was considerable interest in the foreign situation. There was much talk in the papers of the danger of intervention by the European Powers. We, who were foreigners in Moscow, had no means of ascertaining the truth of this matter. But it was quite clear to us that, whether this danger existed or not, the Bolsheviks were exploiting the general fear of it in order to gain further support for their cause. It was no use telling a Russian that the relations which the Soviet Government were believed to entertain with the Comintern gave far more cause for alarm in Europe than the alleged conspiracy of other Powers could do in Russia. He would reply that the whole world had already intervened in Russia, whereas communism had not yet undertaken any aggression. Just so. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the failure of European intervention in Russia was shown to be inevitable. There was too little common ground and too many conflicting interests. On the other hand, no communist denies the necessity of a



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world revolution sooner or later, and that is a question of the future and not of the past.

It seemed to us, as we viewed the situation from Moscow, that the menace of intervention, however baseless the charge may have been, was determining the attitude of a large section of the community towards the Soviet Government. Many of those who dislike the present regime regard the danger of foreign invasion as a far greater evil, and are prepared to swallow their objections to the Bolsheviks. But it seemed, further, that the accusation of dumping was not calculated to improve the situation. Unfortunately it was made by precisely those countries that were most anxious to trade with Russia. If the Bolsheviks are not allowed to dump in the countries where they buy machines, then they must do so elsewhere. In other words, certain countries expect Russia to sell at low prices in third countries, in order to get the money to pay for these purchases of industrial machinery. They want the trade, and any calculation shows that this can only be had if Russia dumps. And yet they are anxious that the distress caused by dumping should be suffered by other countries

## Part Two

that draw no profit from the trade. The Russians are not slow in seeing the injustice of this attitude. The accusation of dumping inflames their passions to the utmost and adds to their grievances.

It is natural that the charge of forced labour in Russia should greatly annoy the communists. Even before allowance has been made for the special circumstances of the task that lies before the present generation, they believe that labour conditions are superior to those in other countries. They deny that labour is "forced". Endless arguments may be used to support each side of this controversy. But all people with whom I discussed it in Moscow seemed to be in agreement on one point. The quantity of work done by each individual Russian cannot be compared to that of the average worker in any other country. This is partly due to the restrictions about working hours and partly to the inferior efficiency of the Russian labourer. I even heard it said quite often that it would take three Russians to perform the same task that would be accomplished by a single European. This conclusion has another consequence

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of the utmost importance. The ultimate power of the Bolsheviks to destroy the capitalist system by purely economic attacks must depend on their ability to undersell the rest of the world. They must be able to produce goods at a lower price. Clearly, labour is the most important element in the cost of production. Many people believe that Russia has solved that problem by making people work for nothing. But the fact that three Russians are required for every single European must inevitably handicap the Bolsheviks to a very considerable extent in the race.

Another subject we frequently discussed was the possibility of Russia's eventually dispensing with the foreign engineers that are at present giving so much assistance in the establishment of plants and industrial machinery. The American engineers with whom I talked did not believe that this was likely to occur. Many people imagine that the foreign experts are only carrying out a temporary need, that they will sooner or later be replaced by Russians, and that the only problem is to train the Russians as quickly as possible. This is over-simplification. It is

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true that great efforts are being made to train Russian engineers, and that in many respects they are proving satisfactory. But in actual fact far more engineers are required than are being supplied by the training colleges. The tempo of the industrialisation is so rapid that the supply of experts from inside Russia is unable to cope with the demand. The services of foreigners have to be purchased at a very high price. The result is that Russia is falling every day more surely into the hands of foreign technicians. There is also the certain fact that the Russians have frequently demonstrated their lack of organising ability. For this they must continue to look abroad. Thus the net of foreign influence in Russia is being woven ever more thoroughly. These men are employed by the Soviet Government and cannot use their influence to serve their own ends. But their very presence is a reassuring feature in the situation. They are a link between the old civilisation and the new. They can refuse to allow Russia's economic power to be diverted to ends of which they disapprove. Thus they stand out to-day as the one stretch of blue sky in the dark storm-

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cloud which the Bolshevik industrialisation has called into being.

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After visiting the places of general interest in Moscow, I had more time to see some of the modern buildings. I went out to a textile factory district. I had already heard so much discussion and read so many opinions on Russian factories that a brief visit was all that I required. It was clear to me by the cards and posters that I saw hanging about that hundreds of persons must have visited this factory every year. They seemed to be in touch with communist societies in every part of the world. As it is almost impossible to form an objective opinion when one is loaded with the burden of previous arguments, I contented myself with a brief survey over the factory.

My chief interest in this particular district was the school. It is no exaggeration to say that this was a remarkable place. It was intended for the children of the workers, and

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they stayed there from the age of eight to sixteen. Others were accepted, but they were only exceptions. The biological section was very impressive, and would compare more than favourably with anything in this line that I have seen in any other part of the world. The education in this school was purely practical. Instruction was given in such things as carpentry and the making of tools and spare parts for machinery. It appeared that many of the implements made in the school were actually used in the neighbouring factories. In this way children are taught to feel at a very early age that they are playing an important part in the great work of industrialisation.

One of the directors of the school asked me if I would care to see some of the children at work. I assented very readily. A door was opened, and I was shown into a class-room where a lesson in optics was in progress. In every school there are some teachers who are able to keep order and others who are not. It was soon evident that the mistress who was teaching optics belonged to the second category. My entrance was made the excuse for a general

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pandemonium on the part of the pupils. Many of them had prisms and curious glass devices for reflecting rays. These were all focused upon me. Some of the bigger children at the back stood up and whistled. I approached the mistress and tried to say a few words in praise of the school, and in particular of her own share in its work. Her answer was drowned amid the tumult. When I came out, the director said he hoped that I had enjoyed the visit, and I told him I had been greatly impressed.

The school also contained every requirement for physical culture and recreation. There was a very modern gymnasium, equipped with all the latest devices. There was a small playground and a large play-room inside the building. An annex to the school was used as a nursery for children to be looked after until they are two or three years old. All the walls were decorated with the most vigorous placards, illustrating the Five-Year Plan. Unfortunately the infants were all asleep at the time I called, so that I was unable to study their reactions to these stimulating surroundings.

I was taken to see some of the lodgings of

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the workers in this district. Many new ones have been built, and they seemed clean and comfortable. On the other hand, the older ones, where the workmen used to live before the revolution, were far less pleasant. The change is not yet complete, and many of these former homes are still inhabited. In one of them we found a room occupied by several families. The husbands were all working at the time, but there were three women in the room. I asked one of them whether she was looking forward to the change and did not feel any attachment to her old home. She replied that she had been anxious to go for a long time, but that nearly everybody else had already been moved, and she still remained. The people who were showing me round then explained that her husband was not a member of a shock brigade. It is well known that all men and women who are enthusiastic about the Five-Year Plan join these shock brigades and arrange to carry out the work in considerably less time than the original estimate had allowed. This woman's husband had apparently not shown the desired enthusiasm, and had



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naturally annoyed the Bolsheviks. The result was that his wife and family were forced to remain behind, and had probably suffered further, owing to a reduction in the husband's wages.

This reference to the husband's refusal to join a shock brigade instantly produced loud protests from all the three women. In the ordinary course of events those who disagree with the Bolsheviks are reserved in their attitude in the actual presence of communist officials. The men who were showing me round belonged to the managing council of the factory, and might be expected to inspire a certain dread, that fear of the unknown which is the characteristic of life in Russia since the advent of the Bolsheviks. But these women were made of sterner stuff. They represented that type of woman who is able to give vent to her feelings in whatever company she may happen to find herself. Nothing daunts her. Imprisonment and starvation obviously had no terrors for these three heroines. Their husbands had already shown that they could brave the anger of the Bolsheviks, and they were not afraid to do the

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same. The communists tried to urge them with arguments. The women shouted and screamed and used unprintable language about the Bolsheviks. As we left they remained in the doorway and continued to shriek after us. The game had ended in a draw. Neither side had succeeded in defeating the other, though very different tactics had been used by the opposing parties. I shall always admire the courage of these women. I now look back on the incident with the conviction that I never encountered a truer expression of feeling during the whole of my stay in Soviet Russia.

This factory district is very frequently visited by foreigners who come to Moscow. It is certainly equipped with all the latest comforts for workmen. It seems only natural that these two aspects of the situation should be taken together. If one could believe that every factory district in Russia could be compared with this one, then one might regard this as one of the most striking successes of the Revolution. It is hardly necessary to point out that this assumption is not justified. However, the fact remains that this particular district must continue to impress

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those who content themselves with a very short visit to Moscow alone.

In addition to what has already been mentioned there is a very modern House of Culture. This contains a theatre to which all the workers in the district have free access. I was told that the hall was used every night. Sometimes there is a play, sometimes a cinema, or else a lecture. I inquired what form of entertainment attracted the largest audiences, and was told that absolutely no distinction is drawn. To us there is a very great difference between a lecture and a musical comedy. In a communist House of Culture these both serve identically the same purpose. They are means wherewith to further the Revolution. The lecture would be on industrialisation, on the progress already made, and on the best way of accelerating the work that is still to be done. The theatre and cinema might be anti-religious or might aim a last blow at the Tsars. But it is still more likely that their object would be to stimulate class hatred, to bring the workers of the town into touch with the progress that has been made in the country, and, above all, to demonstrate that the whole

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work must be the result of a united effort. There is no need for the film to have a plot. The Bolsheviks prefer good pictures of tractors and collective work on the Soviet farms. How to help and how to hinder is made abundantly clear. Nothing else matters. I once asked a communist woman whether she liked Charlie Chaplin. She admitted that she had seen one of his films, but could not see that it was in any way amusing. It seemed to her too far removed from all that Soviet Russia stands for. She said that he had no appeal whatever to any modern Russian audience.



One morning I went with an American and two guides from the Intourist Agency to a communal house. This was a fairly new building in a factory district. It was five or six stories high and formed three sides of a square. It held very nearly six hundred people. In the square there were children playing about under the supervision of two elderly women. We entered and asked to be shown round.

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We saw first the nursery where children may be left by their parents. There is no obligation to do this if the parents prefer to keep their children themselves. But it seems to be more usual for children to be sent at a very early age into the nurseries. Here they are looked after night and day by special nurses, and the parents need take no further interest in their offspring. They have, of course, to pay for leaving the children there; but the sum varies according to the wages received by the parents, and in cases of need it may be almost nothing. This system is naturally calculated to develop the communist mentality before individualism has had a chance to take root. I saw about thirty children of two or three years old come out of one of the doorways and walk across the square. Two nurses were with them. Occasionally one of the children would leave the crowd and stop to look at a stone or some other of those many objects that have such a fascination for the young. The child was immediately driven back into the herd.

We were also shown over the dining-room, where all members of the house have meals

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together, and over some of the bedrooms. Each family has a room to itself, which is more than can be said of the situation in many of the former buildings. There was a bathroom on each floor and two or three gas-rings, and a small oven. The rooms seemed quite large and were all of a uniform size. The dining-room could hold about half the inmates of the house at a time.

The great advantage of life in this communal house is that it is very economical. A city worker may be said to earn at least eighty roubles a month. Out of this he is required to pay only twenty-seven roubles a month for his room and thirty roubles a month for his meals. These charges may be compared with those that are made in the large hotels, where a foreigner must pay at least ten or twelve roubles a day for his meals. Altogether the contributions which each worker is required to pay to the communal house amount to about sixty-five roubles a month. These sums are collected by the governing body, which generally consists of some ten people elected by all the other members. A worker who earns eighty roubles a month is thus left with fifteen for his personal expenses.

## Russian Close-Up

It is wrong to suppose that there is no private property whatever in such a place. It is true that the members do not own their rooms but only rent them, and that they all have meals in common. But each man has a right to his own personal belongings. If he can afford it there is no reason why he should not rent more than one room. This is often done. In one room we found a woman who was apparently idle. I asked her if she had been unable to find work. She said there was plenty of work for her to do, but that she felt no desire to start any. Her husband was a blacksmith and earned a hundred and fifty roubles a month. They had one room that cost them less than thirty roubles. Their meals cost them sixty roubles altogether. They had no children. So there seemed no particular object in earning more money. This is certainly the attitude of many people in Soviet Russia to-day. They are content to earn their daily bread. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Those who showed us round the house made much of the fact that women have greater freedom under the communal system. Not only can

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they leave their children in the nursery, but they do not have any cooking to do. They have the whole day for work, and the evening for recreation. The American and I went into some of the neighbouring houses, and tried to ascertain the views of these other people on the communal house. It was quite clear that the women were opposed to the scheme far more than the men. The material advantages gained by entering a communal house definitely appealed more strongly to the husbands than to the wives.

Another point that is frequently made is that these communal houses have now been existing in many places surrounded by lodgings of the former type. From this it is inferred that at some future date a whole country may be organised on communist lines and yet be able to live peacefully in the midst of capitalist nations. This point of view is upheld by the Soviet Government itself. It has the obvious advantage of tending to pacify interventionists. But the argument is clearly fallacious. There is a great difference between the outlook of a communal house and that of a whole nation in arms. Nobody who has ever come in direct



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contact with the Moscow spirit can believe for one minute that the inference is justified.

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I was once visiting some new institution with a guide. I have no recollection whether it was a House of Culture or a Peasants' Home. But it was something that might be regarded as "progressive". My guide informed me that under the old regime the building had been used as a brothel. I would have paid little attention to this interesting but unimportant detail if each person I met in the building had not repeated the same thing. It was always said with a warmth of feeling that surprised me at the time, but which I did not then consider to be of any great consequence.

It was only later that I realised what it all meant. I was visiting a Prophylactory. I saw many wards where repentant sinners were spinning wool and doing other work of a domestic nature. But the really interesting part of this visit was a meeting that took place downstairs.

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I had not come in a party, but many of us seemed to have found our way there at the same time, so the director of the establishment deemed it opportune to give us a lecture. We sat down in his room, and he then explained in an eloquent speech, that lasted well over half an hour, about the Soviet plan to "liquidate" prostitution throughout the Union.

It is often believed that the complete freedom of sexual relations in Russia implies the legalisation of the life of the brothel on a gigantic scale. I have even heard it said that a prostitute, who abandons her rights of property over all that is nearest to her, must be the most perfect type of communist. It is very curious that this mistake should have arisen. Actually, prostitution is regarded in Russia as a mild form of capitalism. Even though no prostitute is likely to amass a great fortune, yet her life is counter-revolutionary because the work is not "socially necessary". In other words, there is a tremendous desire to exterminate it. This is a keenly felt religious desire, in the sense that communism is a new religion. No sensible man can regard it as anything else.

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Our orator was brilliant. He produced statistics to show the exact number of prostitutes that had already been liquidated. He emphasised the wide interest that was being taken in the movement all over Russia. I was filled with enthusiasm and rushed out into the street in a mad desire to assist "right now" in this colossal task. No society of old maids was ever more in earnest. But my senses soon returned, and I realised that a visitor to Moscow can easily be carried away by the most unbelievable impulses.

After that the idea always amused me, and I could not help comparing it with the attainment of true Socialism. I do not think that I ever talked to any ardent communist without asking him how long the dictatorship of the proletariat was to last. I admit that it was a futile question, and that I knew the answer long before I ever went to Russia. But I could not resist the temptation to hear them all explain, with the most childish confidence, that the class war would continue until all the enemies of the new regime were finally exterminated. No date could be fixed, but gradually everybody would become a member of the

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proletariat and thus join the dictatorship. Every element would blend into the Great Socialist State. And just in this same way prostitutes were not to be abolished in a day or even in a year, but they were gradually to be liquidated until they no longer existed. One person I met foresaw a time when there would not be a *single* prostitute in the whole of Russia. All this seemed to me so neat and at the same time so magnificent. But how uninteresting.

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On another occasion I went to a cinema. Here there was a stirring film of the civil war called *Tikhi Dom*, which was full of the most violent scenes. It was extremely popular and was shown to full houses for a very long time in many parts of Russia. It might be believed that people who have lived through all the misery of the civil war would resent seeing its horrors exploited in this way. But this is not the case in Russia to-day. Nothing has a stronger appeal to a Moscow audience than

## Russian Close-Up

vivid scenes of the Revolution. The final victory of the Red Flag brings the house down with a tremendous outburst of applause.

It is possible to spend an entire afternoon in the Museum of the Revolution. At the same time, the whole object of it may be seen at a glance. In all party fights the truth tends to be obscured by the distortion of some facts and the concealment of others. The Museum of the Revolution is a party weapon. Much that it contains is sound and true. But it can only be approved by those who acknowledge the communist ideal without reserve. It cannot stand against the fire of objective criticism. There are pictures of those who suffered imprisonment or death for having raised revolts and committed the most atrocious murders. These men are heroes only in the eyes of those who admit that the end justifies the means. Furthermore, it is an old saying that statistics may be made to prove anything. Nowhere have I ever seen a greater wealth of statistics than in this Museum. One large placard shows the percentage increase in industrial production effected by each separate country since the War. It is

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obvious that a country which is still in the first stages of industrialisation can show an annual percentage increase that is far more presentable to the public than would be the picture if the actual number of industries established in Russia were to be compared with the figures for other countries. According to this placard Russia naturally leads the whole world by a gigantic margin. Onlookers can only gasp with pride and admiration, and rush off in their endeavour to make themselves still stronger in the great race for productive efficiency. There is no time to stop and consider whether the placard may not be misleading. The whole atmosphere is one of bustle and energy. The party fighters only smile at a mere exaggeration.

There is a great display of weapons in this Museum. Workers are shown that they must rely for success upon stones, spades, pick-axes and anything that comes into their hands. There are numerous portraits of Karl Marx watching them in their endeavours. It seems unfortunate that the Bolsheviks should have filled this Museum with an illustration of the least attractive side of Marx's teaching. There

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is much in his doctrine that must inevitably have a very wide appeal. His call to action, his demand that men should not allow themselves to be led by "blind forces" and his social philosophy—all have tremendous force. If he had not founded everything upon an economic fallacy he would assuredly have exercised an even greater influence in the world. As it is, his analysis of "socially necessary" labour as that which is paid for at a higher price than any other, when he has already said that the price paid for any labour should depend upon the extent to which it is socially necessary, more than anything else resembles a dog vainly trying to catch its own tail.

However, the Revolutionary Museum concentrates its attention on the hard facts of class war. We are asked to abandon battleships, bombardments and tanks, and to return to the simple methods of the cave-dweller. Now there may be many people, appalled at the horrors of modern warfare, who would be prepared to welcome this return of the human element, assuming, of course, that war is inevitable. This was not at all my impression as I

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wandered through the Museum. I looked at the pictures of those who were raising bricks to throw at the bourgeoisie, and I saw that they fought less for love of their fellows than for hatred of those who were better off than they. It seemed to me that it is far more unpleasant to fight for hatred than to fight for no reason whatever, and all the more so as the hatred inspired by Marx is not natural. Better, I decided, to be blown up by a torpedo launched by some unknown enemy, without even knowing the why and the wherefore, than to be hacked to pieces by a pickaxe. There may be many differences of opinion on this matter, but to me an artificial civilisation must always seem preferable to artificial barbarity.

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One evening I went to the Khudozhiestvenny Theatre. The play was called *Bread*. I can think of no other title that would appeal more powerfully to the population of Moscow. It expresses the central thought that has occupied the minds



## Russian Close-Up

of millions during the last fourteen years and that will continue to do so for many years to come. It is significant and vital. Even "The Red Flag" would not be so brief.

At this time the great campaign to exterminate the Kulaks as a class had already begun. I had been surprised to read of certain events in Eastern Carelia. Under the Treaty of Dorpat the Soviet Government had undertaken to place no barriers there to the development of national culture. In most cases it is not even necessary for the Soviet Government to make such a treaty. It is always so anxious to favour nationalities along its western frontier in order to improve its moral position across the border, and to stir up trouble among its neighbours. But in this case it had even gone to the extent of entering into a treaty obligation with Finland. And yet weird tales were coming down from Eastern Carelia. I once asked a communist how he could account for this. He answered: "those men are Kulaks". It would be impossible to describe the real meaning of these words to anybody who has not seen anything of the movement to suppress the Kulaks.

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They are not an enemy in any way comparable to the Huns in the Great War. They are not enemies of one country in particular, but of the entire human race. They are obstructing the great wheel of progress, and are a menace not only to the present cause, but to every generation that is to follow. Those who are not with the Revolution are against it. But the case against the Kulaks is stronger. They are convicted of undermining the spirit and cutting off the food supplies of the country. No punishment can be too severe for these traitors to the communist ideal.

The theatre and cinema were naturally used to further this movement. The play called *Bread* concerned itself with the question of organising the supply of wheat in country districts. Communist agents were sent down to collect all the produce of a recent harvest. Presently a very obvious Kulak entered. I have always admired those who play the part of a villain. Before a communist audience the circumstances are exceptional. I even began to wonder how he would ever be able to face the fury of the mob as he left by the stage-door.

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Nevertheless, his acting was superb. He told the agents that his harvest had been bad, and that he had already given all his produce to the State and to the poor. The communists refused to believe this story, and the rest of the play turned on their efforts to find the hidden treasure. There were some good scenes where the various members of the crowd expressed their views. The villain was assisted throughout by a woman accomplice, who could not move a step on the stage without crossing herself, thus illustrating the fact that religion is on the side of reaction. In the end the Kulak was murdered in the dark of night and it was found that he had been concealing great hoards of bread. This play is typical of many that are being produced to-day in Soviet Russia.

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One morning I visited what is known as the Peasants' Home. It was situated in an outlying part of Moscow. It forms a club for all peasants who come up to the town for any

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particular reason. They may sleep the night and have all meals there. The fare varies according to the status of the peasant. Thus a member of a collective farm would pay fifty kopecks for the night and thirty-five kopecks for each meal. Another peasant would be required to pay considerably more. A man who arrived with no money at all would be lodged free of charge. A Kulak would be driven from the door. Of course, each man on his arrival is required to produce his papers of identification. It can thus be seen at once to which type of peasant he belongs. I had the impression that only members of collective farms would be really welcome. But there was no way of proving this.

This was a large Home and contained accommodation for several hundred peasants. Upstairs we saw a T-shaped dormitory for men, with nearly two hundred beds. On the ground floor there was a general reading-room. The literature differed in no way from that of every other library in Russia to-day. Downstairs there was a large exhibition. This was intended to show the peasants the latest scientific methods

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of farming. There was a large collection of tools and farming implements, and adequate explanations as to how they should be used. There were interesting models and illustrations of every type of collective farm. A novel feature of this home was the consulting-room, where peasants receive free legal advice. I looked in and saw nearly a dozen legal experts sitting at a table that stretched all the way round the room. Before each of them was sitting a peasant man or woman, and they were all deeply engaged in conversation. In most cases documents were spread out on the table between them. It was difficult to discover what questions they were actually discussing, but I had the impression that they were very elementary and concerned such problems as land tenure, which always raises great difficulties in the peasant mind. Probably the most popular side of the movement is the institution of free medical treatment for those who come to the home. Many peasants stay as long as a month in order to benefit from these advantages. There is naturally a lecture-room as well, where the problem of industrialisation is examined from

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every aspect. The room is also used for a cinema and theatre.

There was one point, however, which caused me a little uncertainty. I had been told repeatedly that this movement to create Peasants' Homes was a great feature of the Bolshevik regime. I had received the positive assurance that no less than fifteen hundred already existed in various towns in Russia. I suggested that perhaps this particular Home might be something out of the ordinary. The answer was that, though they all differed in certain respects, this one was not in any way superior to any other. They were all similar in their general lines, and each one contained all that a peasant could possibly want in the way of legal advice, medical treatment and scientific instruction. If this were really so, then it struck me as a curious fact that so many peasants with whom I entered into conversation in the Home had come from the Caucasus, and even from the most distant parts of Siberia. It may well be that these men and women had come to Moscow on other business. But that is very unlikely. Peasants do not travel about much in Russia, and most of

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these seemed to have been obliged to make the journey in order to profit by some of the free assistance which the Home was able to offer them. It did not seem probable that they would have come so far if any other similar Home had existed in their neighbourhood. However, I have no desire whatever to attack the creation of Peasants' Homes. It is undoubtedly an excellent movement, which one may wholeheartedly applaud. Still, the incident illustrates how easy it is in Russia to-day to jump at conclusions that are not founded upon fact. Very few statements may be accepted without proof.



After six days in Moscow I left for Kiev. This journey now takes twenty-four hours, as Russian trains are very crowded and very slow. At one station I asked the train attendant where we would stop next, rather hoping that there was no further halt before Kiev. He pointed out to me a tree some two or three hundred yards down the line. I then inquired

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where the next stop would be, delighted at this spark of humour. The attendant kept up the game and now pointed out a cottage at a distance of about a quarter of a mile. The train started, and his prophecy proved to be correct in both cases. So it had not been humour after all.

Enough has already been written about the transport system in Soviet Russia. The trains are only one example. It must be remembered that there are no roads in the country capable of supporting heavy traffic. In the neighbourhood of Leningrad we once went out in a large 'bus. The surface of the road could not be seen owing to the very thick layer of dust. Our progress caused such a cloud that pedestrians used to rush for shelter at the sight of our approach, and the horizon behind us was black. Round one corner we met a cart drawn by a weary horse. The peasant was lying asleep and had no warning of the avalanche that was about to descend upon him. It was a long time before the dust settled again. When the cart reappeared there was no more sign of the peasant. We were left to imagine that he



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had run down to a stream not far from the road, or that he now lay completely buried in his cart.

The situation in the towns is even worse. As there are no private cars, the inhabitants have to rely upon the trams. But these are scarce. The New York subway during the rush hour is bad enough. But the open-air fight for a Russian tram is yet sterner. Once the tram is boarded, the trouble is not yet over. The passengers get in at one end and out at the other. If you reach your destination before it is your turn to get out, then you are carried past it. If your turn arrives before your destination, then you are probably forced out and have to get in again at the other end. Of course you may be lucky enough to get one of the seats. But if you take advantage of this, then you lose your place in the queue and probably have no chance of getting out when the time comes. But there is at least one bright side to it all. Women who enter with children do not have to wait until a kindly passenger offers his seat. They may claim it as a right, and invariably do so. It may not always be necessary to

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have this rule, but on some occasions it seemed to me to be a very good thing. It is also probable that the situation will soon be greatly eased. The number of trams may be increased, and the plans for an underground railway, at least in Moscow, are said to be complete.

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The journey to Kiev was not without incident. Once again I found myself in the company of soldiers. We talked a good deal about the probability of war. They seemed convinced that the whole world was awaiting the opportunity to attack Soviet Russia. I tried to explain that the number of soldiers I had seen in Moscow and Leningrad alone justified similar fears on the part of the rest of the world. They were sincere in their belief that Russia does not meditate war. Soldiers are massed near the Western frontier because they have already been warned, in 1919, that danger lurks in that quarter. All Russia wants is peace in order to carry on with her economic plans. She cannot think

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of war for several decades. No communist ever answered this question otherwise. "But", I asked the soldiers, "what would happen if a strike in some other country ever attained the dimensions of a revolution?" They answered that the common bond between the workers of the whole world would require Soviet Russia to assist in preventing the revolution from being crushed. "That", they said, "would not be intervention. Russia has such a close interest in the welfare of the workers of every country that it is no longer possible to speak of *intervention* with regard to Russia's attitude. It would rather be a defence of the working class against the attacks of those who are in charge of the capitalist machinery." This very free interpretation of a war of defence is widely upheld in Soviet Russia to-day. War as an instrument of *national* policy is condemned and renounced. But war as an instrument of *international* policy is a very different thing.

At a very early hour I was awakened by an official at the Ukrainian frontier station, and was led away to a small office. My passport did not produce the desired effect, and I had

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to give further explanations about the object of my journey and show any written evidence I possessed in support of my statements. When I returned to the train I asked the other passengers whether they had all undergone a similar experience. They had not. I resented this incident at the time, but must now admit that I can remember no other occasion upon which, as a foreigner, I was treated in any other way than if I had been an ordinary subject of the U.S.S.R.

Towards noon we stopped at a station called Konotop. The train attendant assured me that we had a full half-hour to wait, and I seized the opportunity to join a seething mass that was besieging the food counter. After fighting for twenty minutes I secured a bottle of kvass. This is a popular drink at every Russian railway station, and is only agreeable under such conditions. Elsewhere it should be refused. Just as I was sitting down to enjoy it, I saw my train steam out of the station. I was annoyed at the prospect of losing my suitcase and coat, which I had left in the train. Fortunately, I had all my papers of identification. The G.P.U.

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were very helpful and telephoned to the next station to have my suitcase taken out. It was to be given to me when I arrived in the next train. The G.P.U. officials refused to allow me even to pay for the telephone call, and offered to give me any further assistance. During the whole time I was in the Ukraine I could not help being impressed by the far more sympathetic nature of its inhabitants.

I had some three hours before the next train arrived, and took a walk out in the country. Apart from the poverty here, I met with scenes that might be encountered in any small European village. There was a statue of Lenin, but practically no propaganda. A hairdresser, a tailor and various other small shopkeepers were plying their trades. I saw a school, but it was not such as I had seen in Moscow. It was in a basement, and I saw the children sitting at work below the level of the street. The day was hot, the road was dusty, a few peasants strolled idly past, chattering to their weary horses. . . . "Let not ambition mock their useful toil!" But it was not they who angered me at that moment; it was rather the many foreigners

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who are content to visit Moscow only, and who return full of enthusiasm for all that has been accomplished by the Revolution. Let them only visit some of these smaller places and see whether their first opinion needs revising. No advantage is gained by merely emphasising the backwardness of the Russian village. But the point is that the Russian Revolution is being weighed to-day in the balance of achievements. No other standard is possible, nor do they desire that it should be otherwise. Therefore it is essential to avoid the illusion that certain institutions exist when they may be only the fabrication of Moscow artists. Konotop is not an exceptional Russian village. It is one of many.

I caught the next train and shared a compartment for two with a young man who was wearing a Ukrainian national shirt. He informed me later that he did so less from patriotic ardour than because these shirts may be bought at a cheaper price than any others. I was grateful for this information as I foresaw the possibility of losing my suitcase again, and by now had little money left. The young man

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was asleep when I entered and did not wake up for nearly two hours. He said that he had been travelling for five days without a stop, as he had had some temporary employment in a distant part of Russia. But his original home was the Ukraine, and he started to talk about it. He told me that 60 per cent. of its agricultural population already belonged to collective farms, and that such great strides were still being made in this direction that in a very short time the whole Ukraine would be organised on this basis. This greatly surprised me at the time as I did not yet realise what a very wide interpretation is given to the term Collectivisation. The young man might have spoken more, but at this moment exhaustion overcame him, and he did not awaken again until the end of the journey.

## PART III





## PART III

### KIEV

WE reached Kiev very late in the evening. It was not possible to catch more than glimpses of the beautiful rows of chestnuts and poplars that line its streets. Kiev richly merits its name: The Green City. There is a certain freshness in its air that is more than welcome to the city-dweller. Some parts of the town are very old and date as far back as the twelfth century, but one never has the impression that they are squalid. There is a far more natural joy of life in Kiev than is noticeable in the larger towns in Russia. People do not think only of bread and clothes and classes. They have abundant means to live and prefer to do so in the most agreeable manner. This does not mean that the Revolution has not affected Kiev. Since 1917 the city has been captured and recaptured probably more often than any other city in the Soviet Union, and has known almost every form of government. It has seen soldiers pillaging its houses and shells demolish-

## Russian Close-Up

ing its art treasures. It has suffered the confiscation of property, the withdrawal of its food supplies and every other horror of the Revolution. But the people have overcome these difficulties. They now remind one of nature that returns to bloom and vigour after a heavy April shower.

I obtained a room at the Continental Hotel. I have frequently been asked whether hotels in Russia are comfortable. The actual buildings and much of the furniture in the rooms are the same as they were before the Revolution. But the State ownership of hotels has made a great difference. There is no longer any competition, and no obligation on the part of the servants to carry out orders. If a foreigner is dissatisfied there is nowhere else for him to go. The State naturally profits if a foreigner spends money in the hotel, but this consideration weighs as heavily in the mind of a porter or a waiter as the desire to sell stamps may be said to occupy that of an assistant in a London post-office. It means more work for an intangible gain. There is no reason for complaining of any particular discomfort in Russian hotels.

## Part Three

It is true that hot baths are not obtainable, and that the plug in the basin is generally out of order. Every morning and evening it is possible to get a glass half-filled with hot water. This must be carefully diluted with cold water and the mixture is made to suffice. The food is not bad, but it often takes a very long time to arrive. The long waits for supper always annoyed me intensely. The meal used to consist of meat and vegetables, brown bread and a glass of very hot tea. The brown bread may be eaten with the meat and does not count as a course, but unfortunately the tea does. It was always bad enough waiting well over half an hour for the first course, but it was exasperating to have to wait another half-hour for tea that was far too hot to drink when it came. Nothing could induce the waiters to bring the two "courses" at the same time.

It must not be supposed that the waiters in Soviet Russia are intentionally disobliging to foreigners. They do not bring meals any quicker to the worker who comes straight from the factory and sits beside you, without a collar and with his shirt unbuttoned. The waiters

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belong to the serving class in Soviet Russia, and that is a very different thing from the workers. In it are included all those who do no manual labour. They are not treated in the same way as the workers. They are expected to eat less, their ration-card allowing them only about two-thirds of the food that is granted to the others. The general price of commodities is also higher for them, so that they must economise rigidly in clothes and other requirements. But the real difference is that they do not rule the country like the proletariat. They work "mechanically, as tamed beasts answer the whipcrack". This arrangement naturally gives them the feeling that they are not getting anything out of the Revolution. They dare not oppose the movement altogether; but by taking nearly two hours to bring a meal that is ready in five or ten minutes they set up a very effective passive resistance.

I asked many of the waiters why they had chosen this particular calling in life. I expected to hear each one say that he had been obliged to do it for lack of a job elsewhere. This was never the reply. They always answered that

## Part Three

they had no particular desire to do manual labour. Even the temptation to become dictators of the country could not induce them to toil in the factory. This sort of spirit is naturally not approved by the Bolsheviks, and the serving class is treated accordingly.

One waiter in a Kiev hotel attracted my notice as soon as I entered the dining-room. I had seen many illustrations of Ukrainian peasants, and there was a certain type of face that had become vividly impressed upon my mind. To my great delight this waiter possessed every one of the features that I had come to associate with a national of the Ukraine. I asked him how long he had been in the hotel. He said he had been there for nearly nineteen years and that he had seen some very strange happenings in that time. I asked him to expand on this subject and he promised to do so. Unfortunately, his method was unsatisfactory. He did not serve at my table, but at others. He used to pass behind me carrying plates back and forth from the kitchen. Every time he passed he would tell me a few words. But as his sentence always began long before he reached

## Russian Close-Up

me and ended long after he had passed, I never understood what the "happenings" had been. And a further disappointment was in store for me. I stopped him once and asked him where in the Ukraine was his birthplace. He replied that he was a Greek and that he had only come to Russia some twenty years ago. Never again did I see such a perfect type of Ukrainian peasant. It may be that it no longer exists; or perhaps this shock discouraged me from further search.



The first day in Kiev I spent exploring some of its historic buildings. The Lawra is full of interest, and there is now an excellent electric-lighting system to enable visitors to see the underground monastery. A short time ago people had to wander through these gruesome passages, past hundreds of bones and skeletons, with the aid of a candle only. It was not difficult to get lost. But now the visit is made very easy. Most of the monastery buildings are used

## Part Three

as a home for cripples. The church in the centre has been turned into an anti-religious museum. There is a large placard inside, showing how many millions were consumed by the former inhabitants of the monastery in the form of tithes and other contributions in money and kind from the surrounding neighbourhood. Each article is dealt with separately. In order to make the matter perfectly plain, even to an illiterate peasant, the whole placard is in the form of an illustration. Thus there is a picture of a loaf of bread, and beside it a large number representing the total cost in roubles of all the bread that was supplied in 1913. Shoes and clothing and all other contributions are treated in the same way. The figures are astronomical, and especially those concerned with drink. No point receives greater emphasis in an anti-religious museum than the capacity of the former clergy to consume vodka. Certain pictures by Sierov are awarded a prominent place in communist galleries, not for their artistic merits, but because they depict the crusading zeal of the Russian clergy as a thinly veiled excuse to be intemperate.



## Russian Close-Up

From an architectural point of view, Kiev is unique. There are many very old churches and cathedrals and several different styles, though these are chiefly classical, byzantine, Ukrainian baroque, or a very heavy rococo. Some churches are still used for religious purposes, though many have been transformed. There is also a wealth of museums in Kiev. A former residence of the late Imperial Family has been turned into an agricultural museum, and is a source of knowledge in all the latest scientific inventions. The historical museum deserves a long visit. For anyone who is interested in Ukrainian literature, the rooms that are concerned with Shevchenko and Gogol are a positive realm of delight. There is naturally a museum of the Revolution. This has been considerably improved in the last few months.

Later in the morning I went up past the statue of Vladimir and the Michael monastery. This is not farther than the outskirts of the town, but the way there leads through so many trees and bushes, and there are so many birds and other signs of nature, that one has the impression of a country residence. I should advise

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anybody who goes to Kiev to take this walk. If the day is fine, his effort will be rewarded many times over. There is a magnificent view over the Truchanov Island that lies in the river a long way below.

“There is delicious quiet in this scene,  
At once so rich, so varied, so serene.”

The place is never solitary, even at a very early hour. It is a favourite promenade for the whole population of Kiev.

The general impression that I gained on this first day in Kiev was that the people are far better off and have greater leisure than elsewhere. The Ukraine has great natural resources, and this enables the people to live in comparative comfort. The shops do not merely sell absolute necessities, but go to the extent of more expensive clothes and furs. In some of the cinemas I actually saw that American films which had no direct connection with the Revolution were being shown. In the evening I went to a ballet at the Opera. The production was excellent, and the Opera House is kept in extraordinarily good condition. All that was

## Russian Close-Up

there to remind me that I was not in any ordinary European city was a series of large hanging notices in red, proclaiming such messages as "Revolutionary greetings to Spain", "Down with the anti-Dumping campaign" and many others. I am convinced that these notices were only the remains of the recent May Day celebrations, and that they do not represent the permanent attitude of the population of Kiev.

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The next day I made inquiries at the In-tourist Agency as to how I might visit a collective farm. I had purposely not done so until now because it seemed far more reasonable to wait until I was in the Ukraine, which is the greatest food-producing area in Eastern Europe. It soon appeared that, from their point of view, I had acted wrongly. I was informed that I should have gone to a collective farm when I was in Moscow, and that it is very difficult to reach one from Kiev. I pointed out that an acquaintance in the train had told

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me that 60 per cent. of the Ukraine was already collectivised. Since then I had seen some official Soviet statistics to support the statement. The man in the Agency answered that this was indeed true, but that there were many different kinds of collective farm. In the most elementary one peasants merely cooperate during harvests, and at other times when there is special work to be done. In another kind the peasants live in their separate houses, but own all their tools, machines and farmlands in common. All the produce is divided up between the members. In a third kind all the members of the farm live together in a communal house. This is the most perfect type of organisation, and is the ideal of those who believe in true communism. All other forms are merely stages on the way, and it is hoped that they will be subject to a natural law of evolution. Clearly, it would be waste of time for me to visit a farm that was still in one of the first stages. Apart from new machines and methods of husbandry there would be nothing of striking interest. The real thing to see would be one of the completed farms. Unfortunately, none of this kind existed

## Russian Close-Up

in the immediate vicinity of Kiev. The nearest one required nearly two hours by train to reach. That was not all. There was still a walk of six kilometres from the station to the farm, the weather was extremely hot and there was a certain prospect of a thunderstorm. I insisted upon making the journey because it was my last opportunity of seeing a collective farm. Also the difficulties of getting there, far from discouraging me, were the most welcome that I could have wished. I now felt sure that I should see something genuine and not a mere model established and maintained for the deception of foreign visitors. When I eventually reached the farm I soon discovered that strangers were practically unknown in that neighbourhood, and I rejoiced that fortune had favoured me so highly.

I was taken by a guide from the Agency. Travelling is expensive in Russia, and we determined to economise by going in the "hard" class. There is a great difference between this and "soft" travel, and it is not merely one between wooden and cushioned seats. If that were all, an air-cushion would solve the diffi-

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culty. But it is a question of crowd and atmosphere. In a "soft" compartment each person has a whole side to himself. In the "hard" class people sit as close together as possible, which means about five on each side. When the door is closed a folding-seat is pulled out, and holds at least two more people. A similar one on the other side holds two or three more. Calculation shows that there is thus accommodation for about fourteen people. But that is not all. There are no less than two more layers of seats above your head. In other words, the compartment is three stories high. In the upper two stories folding-seats are not necessary. The seats are fixed and extend all the way round, and are high enough not to obstruct the doorway. Add to all this the fact that over certain stretches of the line, and over bridges, it is obligatory to keep all the windows shut, and the picture of a "hard" compartment is almost complete. Not quite, however. There still remains the Russian habit of eating curious things that look like dried black seeds. I have no idea what these are, but I have a vivid recollection of how they are eaten. A person

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holds a plate of them on his knee. He takes one seed at a time, cracks it with his side-teeth, then puts it in his mouth in front, rummages with his tongue and spits out the remains. I have seen people sit for hours and carry out an endless repetition of these three or four motions. One old woman observed my interest in this new form of entertainment and offered me some out of her plate. I tried for a long time to extract something out of the seeds. But they were small and dry and I had no success, although I tried many of them. One expert in the compartment could eat them at the rate of about ten a minute. I had the impression that the contents must be quite tasteless. The habit of eating them grows upon people and forms an excellent substitute for smoking. It does not, however, add to the pleasures of a railway journey for other people. It is all right when the occupants of the ground-floor seats do it, but when the people in the upper stories start playing the same game it is a very different thing.

This experience, however, had a distinct compensation. I had an opportunity of hearing these people talk without any of the barriers

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that sometimes restrict conversations in Russia. Not that they talked politics or touched upon any deep issue. But they conversed as people do when they find themselves thrown together under such conditions. I often wondered how far the term "Humanity Uprooted" might be fairly applied to Russia to-day. On this occasion I felt convinced that a spark of human feeling still glowed, and that no form of government, no social changes, no new religious outlook, and no future civilisation would ever succeed in extinguishing it. But I speak only of the Ukraine. It may be so in the rest of Russia. Time alone can tell.

We reached the station towards midday. It was very small, and consisted only of a booking-office and waiting-room. In England or Scotland a passenger would have to warn the guard that he intended to get out at such a station or the train might not stop. In Russia not the united protests of all the passengers would avail to prevent the train from stopping. On the platform some half-dozen people were walking about barefoot, wearing rags. In the towns barefooted people are frequently seen. In the



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In country they are the rule rather than the exception. Those that wear anything at all on their feet have a sort of bandage that goes up as high as the knee. Beside the platform was a fence, and three or four peasant women were standing there with glasses and jugs of milk, which they were selling to the passengers. When one speaks of passengers in Europe one imagines well-dressed men and women alighting from Pullman cars. This picture is untrue of Russia. Those who now descend from the train are probably wearing boots or shoes, but their rags are in no way superior to those of the people who are walking on the platform. The day is hot, and one or two passengers approach the women who are selling milk. There are angry disputes about the price. The women say they are selling at a loss, and are told they are lying. The milk in the earthenware jugs has been boiled and is covered with a thick coat of dark-brown skin. One man is impatient because the milk is poured out so slowly. He seizes the skin in his fingers, and eats it as if it were a biscuit.

Apart from this station and two or three

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cottages lying quite near, there is nothing but flat country for miles around. We are in the very heart of one of the greatest wheat-producing countries in the world. The harvest promises to be a record one. I think of the starving millions who are praying for good harvests and cheaper bread, and then remember the logic of those who regard bad harvests as the only safeguard against over-production. The Bolsheviks have no patience with these arguments. Bread must be given to all those that are in need. What is over must be sold abroad at any price, regardless of the difficulties of other people. If these object, then their system must be at fault. The whole country-side seemed to rejoice at this prospect of upholding communist principles. In the distance we saw some trees and made our way towards them, as we knew that the farm lay about one kilometre beyond them.

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We reached our destination at about one o'clock, and were very warmly received by one

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of the members of the farm. It turned out later that he was one of the ten people who are elected to form the governing body. These men and women are in entire control of the farm and are only bound by their obligations towards the Soviet Government. These are often very severe, as the Government only undertakes to provide machines and tools on the distinct understanding that the farm will deliver to the Government officials all its produce, retaining only the bare necessities of life.

Peter Alexandrovitch, as our new acquaintance was called, invited us in to luncheon in the communal dining-room. This we entered by descending a small flight of steps. The room had a stone floor and presented an appearance of the utmost cleanliness. Peasants came in straight from the land in their bare feet, but the floor, tables and benches are probably washed at least twice a day. The room was not as large as I expected. There were about a dozen tables, at each of which some ten people might sit. The whole farm consisted of about six hundred people. Clearly they could not all be accommodated here at the same time. But

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they used to come in at any hour of the day, eat a hurried meal and then return to their work. In this way there was a constant stream of people entering and leaving the dining-room. I believe there was also another dining-room in some more distant part of the farm.

We sat at one of the tables and were joined by two or three more peasants. Our host ordered us some soup. This contained all the ingredients with which only a Russian knows how to fill a soup. After a fairly exhausting morning I found it very appetising. The guide who was with me took about two spoonfuls, and left the rest, whispering to me that it was quite extraordinary what rubbish (the real word was stronger than this) country peasants were content to consume. This is only typical of the remarkable antagonism that has grown up between the town and the country. I remembered an incident in the play called *Bread* that I had seen at Moscow. A dispute had arisen between some peasants and workers. The country people were complaining that all their food was being carried off into the towns, in order that the factory hands, who already had a far more

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exciting time than the peasants, might live in ease and comfort. A communist agent, mounting a platform, addressed the crowd. In a calm voice, but in chosen words that rang through the house, he proclaimed to the mob that there was work for all in the towns if they would care to forsake their homes and join in the drudgery of factory life. Let them not think that the workers have a pleasant time. They have sacrificed all they possess, and are pursuing the communist ideal with untiring energy and at the cost of the most bitter hardships. Let all those who thought that it might be otherwise only come to the factories and work there themselves. Not a peasant responded to this appeal. The crowd was effectively silenced, but the audience applauded. It was my experience that in a Moscow theatre or cinema the words of a communist agent are always treated with the greatest respect. But on this particular occasion the loud cheers that greeted the exposure of the selfishness of the peasants seemed to me particularly significant.

After the soup we had another course. This is more difficult to describe. It consisted of

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meat and suet rolled together in the shape of thick sausages. We had five each, which was more than a generous supply. The whole was covered with cream, that had unfortunately turned sour, as the weather was thundery. However, we all ate with great relish, except the guide, who made an expression as if to suggest that by some curious accident we were at that moment depriving the pigs of their afternoon meal.

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After luncheon we were taken out to see round the farm. In describing its organisation as the most perfect type of communal ownership, the Intourist Agency had slightly overshot the mark. The wish had been father to the thought. Real communism was still in its embryonic form. Many material conditions were lacking. In the final stage of the collective farm all the members should live in the same building. But this cannot be brought about without much reorganisation and the construc-

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tion of large houses to replace the former cottages. There are other things to do in the Soviet Union, and these other things are more urgent. In the case of this farm there was indeed one new building, but it was not large enough to hold all the peasants. Altogether they lived in twelve houses. These were rather scattered, but formed two distinct groups. I saw seven houses, and was told that the remaining five were at a distance of about three kilometres. They were out of sight behind some trees. However, the peasants do the best they can under these conditions. Each house is turned, if possible, into a miniature communal house. That is to say, there is a room for each man and wife, though sometimes two families share a room; there is a large dormitory for men, and another one for women. Some of the cottages were too small to contain all this. In that case they were used for bedrooms only, or might have just one dormitory for men, or one for women. Naturally, this arrangement is only temporary. As soon as they have their new building they will all live under one roof.

A branch of the large building was used as

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a nursery for children up to the age of seven. This was, broadly speaking, the same as the nursery I had seen in a communal house in Moscow. The children were having their afternoon rest when we entered, and there were three special nurses in attendance. Such a room with its rows of sleeping children has the appearance of a hospital or an orphanage. The system may have many advantages, especially if the nurses are well trained, but it is hard to believe that people should seriously want their children to be brought up in that way. Yet large numbers certainly leave them there, and I can only repeat that it is hard to believe.

Peter Alexandrovitch then showed us over the rest of the farm. There was a large square yard, of which one side was formed by the new building. The others consisted of stables, a barn and a shed with a threshing-machine. A few peasants were gathered round a well in the centre of the yard. At one end of the new building was a porch and about ten people were sitting around; two of them were playing musical instruments. Everybody I met on this farm seemed very young. Even Peter, who was a



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member of the governing body, was well under thirty-five years old. Communism is certainly a movement for the youth of Russia.

The commune also possessed a school where children go after they leave the nursery at the age of seven. I sat down on a bench and talked to some of the schoolboys. Their first question was whether we had any Pioneers and Young Communists in England. Curiously enough, this had also been the first question of some children to whom I had spoken in Moscow. I had always heard that this movement had acquired great strength in Russia, and the truth of this was now more surely impressed upon me. It is certain that communism will gain in strength when the younger generation grows up. It is inevitable that the continuance of hardships and sacrifices should strain the endurance of people at this time. But the youth of the country is obviously in favour of the movement, and if the cost of living is eventually reduced after the establishment of more industries, then the balance will undoubtedly be turned in favour of the Bolsheviks.

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The actual methods of farming did not differ greatly from those that may be seen in Europe. The interesting part was the organisation. Not only was there communal living, but there was every convenience that is possessed by an ordinary village. Peter showed us over the bakery. As they make their own bread on the farm, they are able to live very economically. We were then taken to see the milk-room. Here there were two or three young women at work. They were singing, but not each one to herself, after the wont of other milk-maids. They sang in unison, true followers of communism. Peter then led us through the stables, and we saw cows, pigs, horses and every other animal that is associated with a farm. As we were admiring the cattle some other peasants joined the party, and we soon had quite a following. Whenever we paused before a particularly healthy bull or cow, one of the crowd would always ask me whether we had anything to compare with it in England. If I gave any hint of having seen such a thing before, there was obvious disappointment. But if I assured them that, to my knowledge, no beast existed in the world that could

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be placed alongside this specimen on anything like favourable terms, they seemed to be satisfied. They were simple people, and hardly any of them had seen anything of life outside the farm. The idea that their best bull might not really be anything out of the ordinary had never occurred to them.

I could not converse very fluently with these peasants for they spoke the Ukrainian dialect. I only understood some of their words, though they could understand my Russian without being able to speak it themselves. The Bolsheviks have always taken great pains to encourage nationalism in the Ukraine. This is a dangerous policy, as many people in that country believe that, with their great natural resources, they would be better off if they seceded from the U.S.S.R. According to the Russian Constitution they are nominally at liberty to do so at any time. It is open to question whether any State would ever be in a position to exercise this right. However, the support of nationality in this part of the Union has the obvious advantage of gaining the sympathies of the population of the Polish Ukraine.

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This double aspect of the problem, together with the great historical complications that have been brought to light, make the Ukrainian question exceedingly difficult to solve. Attempts are continually being made to exploit the situation even by those who have only a remote or indirect interest.

This policy of the Bolsheviks differs entirely from that of the Tsars, who attempted to Russianise the Ukraine. They were not successful in abolishing the Ukrainian dialect, but they made the learning of the Russian language compulsory in all the schools. The result has been that many people in the Ukraine now speak both languages. But if a distinction is to be drawn, it is generally true that most of the townspeople speak Russian and the peasants speak the dialect. Therefore it is clear that the Bolshevik policy has the additional advantage of inducing the peasants to support the regime. The guide who had brought me was fortunately able to speak both languages and translated any of the dialect that I could not understand into Russian. In this way I was able to talk to the peasants.

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These people receive newspapers every day. There is quite often an article in *Pravda* or *Izvestia* dealing with foreign affairs. But their knowledge is very highly coloured. For them a foreign country has only one interest: Is the Revolution likely to occur there? They have never heard of the existence abroad of any interests apart from that. All their knowledge is gleaned from communist propaganda. They imagine an England composed entirely of exploiters and exploited, where many millions are spending their lives in trying to bring about a revolution, and where all the other millions have no other thought in life than to prevent it. All the questions they asked me ran on these lines. They wanted to know how much land and how many cows an ordinary English peasant possessed; whether there were many farm-hands who had no share in the ownership of the property and merely worked for wages; above all, how many strikes there had been lately, and how I could account for the failure of the General Strike five years ago. I longed to tell them that on the most serious and critical day of that strike there had been a cricket match

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between a team of policemen and a team of strikers, in which each side had cheered the other until they were hoarse. I felt that they would never have understood. Yet they were so sure that they knew everything that matters in life. So is every communist.

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After this we were taken to see some of the agriculture. The day was extremely hot, and the cornfields reflected the sun's rays with dazzling brilliance. The farm buildings lay in the midst of some trees, and resembled an oasis in a scorching Arabian desert. I was disappointed not to see a combine. No illustration of the Five-Year Plan is without pictures of these enormous machines, which are being supplied to the farms as quickly as the money to buy them can be obtained. In fact, I failed to obtain any satisfactory answer as to what machines the farm did possess. I was given to understand that they were all being used in some distant parts of the farm, or else that they

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had not yet been supplied by the Government. At any rate our view extended for many miles in every direction, and no machines whatever were visible. I did not press the point as there seemed no object in doing so.

Not far from the actual farm-buildings were about a dozen cottages lying in two parallel rows. They were in great disrepair, but there were a few signs of life. Peter told me that the inhabitants of that little hamlet had refused to join the collective farm. Consequently, the Government had deprived them of nearly all their lands, though they managed to exist somehow. I asked if we might visit it. As we went there Peter made as many comparisons as he could between existence in this hamlet and in the farm. Any horse or cow that showed itself was declared to be greatly inferior to anything the communists possessed. Even the children that were playing in the cart-ruts, and had covered themselves with mud, were branded as despicable objects. At that moment I was troubled with other thoughts and could not pay much attention to what he said.

I entered one of the cottages. Rarely have I

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seen such poverty. There was not even a chair in the room. There were only bare walls, a dirty wooden floor and some window-seats. In one corner of the room were mats and some bedding. The only ornaments were a couple of ikons. There was a woman of about forty and another one very much older. The husband of the younger one was out at work. She said that ever since the Revolution they had been getting steadily poorer. The Government had not ceased to impose upon them one restriction after another. But nothing would ever induce them to join the commune. Starvation itself were better than that. Truly, these people had suffered every material loss which it is possible for a human being to endure. They had lived formerly in comparative comfort. Now even their rags hardly covered them. Nevertheless, they received us with such a quiet dignity that I could not help reflecting that perhaps they had yet succeeded in retaining something that was missing in the commune. I felt that it was worth retaining: something that cannot be measured in bushels of wheat or in tons of potatoes. Those are the standards on the collective farm.



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I felt that it was something unquestionably higher.

Once during our conversation the elderly woman had crossed herself, and cast an appealing look towards one of the ikons. As we left the cottage I questioned Peter and the guide on the matter of religion in the commune, and asked them whether it was conceivable that a person of strong religious belief could ever be induced to join the collective farm. They answered that this did not really constitute such a barrier as might be supposed. Many members of the commune were Christians and went regularly to church in a village a few miles away. I then asked whether it would ever be possible for such people to bring up their children in the faith. Peter replied that many of them tried to do so. There was no obligation to send their children to the nursery, and all those who were Christians preferred to keep their children as long as possible. But once they reached the age of seven it was necessary to send them to school. Compulsory education has recently been introduced in Russia. Anybody who has seen the inside of a Soviet school knows perfectly

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well to what a deluge of anti-religious propaganda the child would be exposed. But my question still remained unanswered. Clearly, the child would have to go to school whether or not the parents joined the collective farm. Therefore there is no guarantee either way that the child will be brought up as a Christian. But I incline to think that the desire to avoid contacts with communist children even at a very early age is sufficient to discourage the parents from joining the collective farm.

The Russian peasant is intensely religious. In the cottage from which I had just emerged the ikons were not merely the only ornament in the room, but were obviously all that mattered for these people in the whole world. Once in Kiev I saw a very old man crossing the road. His feet were tied up in bandages and he was supporting himself with a crutch. He was so old and shaky that it seemed almost doubtful whether he would ever get to the other side. Fortunately there was no traffic. Before each step the old man crossed himself no less than three times, and it was perfectly obvious that this alone gave him strength to continue. I am

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firmly convinced that if he had ever lost his faith he would have dropped down dead. Nobody can fail to see such scenes in the country in Russia. So it seemed to me that when Peter assured me that people might be Christian and yet join the collective farm, he was not stating more than a half-truth. I wondered whether even he realised what religion means to a Russian peasant. It is not something that may be carried with him from one form of life to another; it is his entire and only existence.

As we left the hamlet and returned to the farm, I endeavoured to draw a fair comparison between what I had seen of the old and the new in Russian country life. I could not help admitting that the difference was very striking. It was necessary to bear in mind that most of the poverty of the hamlet was due to causes outside the control of its inhabitants. It was not their fault that their cows and pigs were badly fed, and that they themselves and their children were clothed in rags. They had not lost their property through idleness; it had been forcibly snatched from them. Nevertheless, the establishment of the collective farm represented an

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improvement in agricultural organisation of which the adherents of the former system had never even dreamed. Above all, it represented energy and material comfort. Those who maintain that this counts for nothing in life should visit a few cottages of the former type in Russia. They must realise that the Bolshevik Government has undertaken a task from which every former Government shrank. It is breaking down superstition and introducing progress. The need was so urgent and the success is so visible that nobody can fail to applaud the achievement. At the same time there are many who condemn the work on the ground that it is not disinterested. Such people are introducing the question of motive into one that is purely concerned with fact. In Germany they would be said to lack "objectivity". The communists do not lack it. They are perfectly aware of the backwardness of their peasant population, and have seen that there is only one way to overcome it. At the same time they do not scruple to exploit the situation. I do not know any word that expresses a careful study and grasp of *objective* conditions, combined with a strict

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observance of *subjective* principles. Perhaps it is Bolshevism.

There was no doubt whatever in my mind as to the value of the improvements I had seen. On the one side was decay and superstition; on the other there was work and cleanliness. To all outward appearances the contrast was extraordinary. But there still remained to be considered the attitude of the people themselves towards the movement. Surely that test is a valid one. There was no uncertainty as to the views of those who lived in the hamlet. They loathed the very mention of communism. What Peter and his associates in the governing body thought was equally clear. They were as enthusiastic as the tremendous heat of the day would allow. But what of the hundreds of peasants who played no prominent part in the farm?

“All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know  
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why  
He made one of the multitude, and so  
Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky  
One of the million leaves of summer’s bier.”

How could one answer this question after just a fleeting visit? One thing impressed itself

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upon me. Those who entered the commune did so either from lack of money or for lack of brains. They were either reduced by poverty to this extreme measure, or their dullness of intellect prevented them from understanding the true significance of their action. Very few people took the final step unless they were forced to do so by circumstances, or unless a certain mental deficiency obscured their reasoning powers. This is a hard thing to say, but I am convinced by what I saw that it is true. The communists themselves are ready to admit it. I remember once asking a "commander" of the Red Army, who was travelling with me in the train, what he thought of communal living. He said that it was an excellent institution, and was bringing great profit to the State. I then asked him whether he himself shared a room and had meals with his men. He said that "commanders" were encouraged to do this, but that nothing would ever induce *him* to live like that. He had a wife and family and preferred to live at home. It was perfectly possible to do so.

This conversation, and general observations in the neighbourhood of communal houses,

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convinced me of the fact that communism in the full sense is fighting a losing battle in Russia to-day. I wish here to distinguish between communism and Bolshevism. The one is an ideal, and the other is a system of practical politics. The Bolsheviks are held in power by the communist party, but it is very much open to question whether they are any longer pursuing the communist ideal in all its aspects. Communal living is too much opposed to human nature, and the system is being discarded. The Bolsheviks may desire all those who are sufficiently gullible to live in this way, if only because it is a sound economic proposition. But they can never expect more than a very small percentage of the population to adopt the scheme. They know it would meet with resistance. Above all, the Bolsheviks claim to be practical and logical.

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By the time we had returned to the farm it was already time for us to go, as we had still to walk back to the station and catch the even-

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ing train to Kiev. A few members of the farm gathered round to wish us good-bye. I asked them a few more general questions before I left. They told me that a worker on the farm receives twenty-four roubles a month for his wages, and pays nine roubles a month for his food and lodging. For the moment these figures seemed to me incredible. I compared them with those of a city worker, whose wages are never less than eighty roubles a month, and who pays sixty-five roubles, approximately, for maintenance. But an easy calculation shows that the city and the country worker are each able to save fifteen roubles for their personal expenses. In other words, it makes no difference whether a man receives twenty-four roubles and pays nine, or receives a million and fifteen and pays a million. This is merely an illustration of the fact that all currency figures in Soviet Russia are purely fictitious. I was frequently asked what the wages of a worker in England or America would be, compared with those existing in Russia. The members of the commune asked it at this moment. But it is impossible to answer the question honestly. In



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the first place, the exchange value of the rouble greatly complicates matters. Then there is the curious misunderstanding to which I have already referred. The peasant believes that his wages are twenty-four roubles a month and the factory worker that his are eighty-five. If each would realise that he really has fifteen roubles left, and that that is very little indeed, much controversy would be avoided.<sup>1</sup>

I then asked them whether it was easy to find work for all the six hundred members of the farm. It seemed to me that this was a large number to keep in steady employment, especially after they had received their labour-saving machines. They replied with an air of the utmost assurance that there was work for all on the farm. I asked them whether they ever saw any signs of unemployment in the neighbourhood. They answered that a man or woman occasionally arrived at the farm and asked for work. All they did was to examine the individual's papers of identification and report the

<sup>1</sup> Fifteen roubles is less than two pounds according to the exchange. The cost of living is, of course, very much higher in Russia than elsewhere. It is significant that, although many savings banks exist, very little use appears to be made of them.

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matter to the G.P.U. If everything was in order, the person would be accepted immediately as a full member of the farm. No distinction was drawn between races or creeds. The man might be a Cossack, a Jew or a Mongolian; it made no difference. I asked them what would happen if twenty-five people turned up next morning and asked to be allowed to join the farm. They replied that there would be work for them all.

We then said farewell to all the farmers, and thanked them for their hospitality. Peter Alexandrovitch asked me to give them my impressions of the visit. I told them that the material comforts and the methodical organisation of the farm were undoubtedly an improvement on anything that had existed previously in Russia. I felt this praise was justified. I shall long remember the friendliness of Peter. He had spent the whole afternoon in showing us round. He was obviously a man who knew his work well, and who had gained the esteem of his fellow-members. He invited us to return at any time and to come and join the farm if we wished.

Before we had gone a hundred yards from the

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farm we were stopped by the children to whom I had spoken a few hours before. They had run after us and told us to wait as they were going to drive us to the station in a cart. This greatly amused us, as the boys were not more than eight years old. However, after a few minutes they returned with the dismal news that the elders of the farm would not allow it. The real message was that the horses were all being used elsewhere, but the children wanted us to come back and argue with the elders. We decided not to do so. The children then presented us with flowers, which I carried back to Kiev. Once more we bid them farewell and set off on our walk of six kilometres to the station.

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We were soon out of sight of the farm, and there were hardly any habitations to be seen for miles around. Part of the time we walked along a country road, and occasionally a peasant would pass, sleepily driving a cart, or trudging along on foot. Not infrequently the peasant

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would greet us with a smile or with some unintelligible remark. My guide always scoffed at this friendliness. In the towns people do not greet you. They are far too busy. They work. But here these idle people have nothing better to do than to wander about trying to talk to perfect strangers. I did not answer.

The sun was still quite high in the heavens. Far from getting cooler in the late afternoon, the day had been getting steadily hotter. There was not a breath of wind to refresh us. The smoke from a distant cottage rose straight upwards in a slender thread. Not even a bird was there to cheer us on our way, but only the incessant buzzing of flies that swarmed upon us from the fields, as if to attack these trespassers upon their native soil. Nevertheless, I recollect many thoughts that flashed through my mind during that walk. I recalled then some accounts, which I had read in the Press, of Russian agrarian policy, and conversations I had had in Geneva and elsewhere, which confirmed these views. I remembered the hustling crowds in Moscow, and their thrill at the thought of expropriating the Kulak. I remembered more

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and more communist propaganda, all of which led one to suppose that the whole country population was striving to carry out its obligations with praiseworthy zeal, and that the peasants were filled with all the enthusiasm that comes from awakening to a new life. I had seen pictures of men in their shirt-sleeves driving gigantic machines, men waving to the photographer and cheerfully proclaiming the victory of the Red Flag. All this was meant to show that the millions of Russian peasants had forsaken their ancient lethargy and had started a vast cooperation in the work of the Five-Year Plan.

How different was the reality. The farm I had just visited was probably one of the most advanced in the whole Ukraine. Yet there were no machines, and their new building was small and inadequate. But the difference was not only visible in the actual construction that had been undertaken; it extended to the peasants themselves. I watched the men who passed us on the road. Clearly they had no conception whatever of the great issues that were at stake. Their vision did not comprise more than their

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immediate surroundings. They lived in the past and not for the future. What could Moscow mean to them? All they knew was that they had less to eat, and that occasionally soldiers would come and try to rouse them to some energetic enterprise.

I tried to picture to myself, as we walked along, that I had lost my passport and money, that I had been unable to leave the country, and that I had been obliged to accept the offer of Peter Alexandrovitch to join his farm. I imagined that I was already a member of the farm, and that I was now on my way to carry out some errand near the station. I began to realise in a way that I had never realised when I was in Leningrad, in Moscow, or even in Kiev, of how little value vague notions of human equality can be in the great open spaces that are Russia. When you are sailing and get lost in the wide ocean, you are glad to see any other ship, regardless of creeds and forms of government. If the ship has food and commodities, it would be doubly welcome. But I reflected that this flat country, that seemed to be almost deserted, was thickly populated in

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comparison with Siberia, whose vast expanse comprises a population of barely twelve millions. I knew full well that for all the members of the farm the news from Moscow could not have more than an academic interest, while any talk of Europe and the League of Nations reminded me of Professor Jeans's description of nebulae that are millions of light-years away from us. It all seemed so unreal. Nothing mattered here but the fact that the farm was miles from any other habitation. It is true that the peasants had gained in a certain sense by the Revolution. They now owned the land in common. But that was already past history. What they now wanted was clothes and other commodities. People here could not possibly concentrate their energies on a movement that only meant greater sacrifices for them with no apparent return. That sort of spirit may easily be kept up in a city, but here it seemed a very different thing.

That was my feeling as I walked towards the station. Since I have returned to England I have read numerous books dealing with the Russian agrarian policy. I continue to learn

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that the movement is meeting with every success, that the original plan for collectivisation has already been exceeded and that production has mounted rapidly. I have before me statistics dealing with every form of livestock and agricultural produce. It may be, of course, that the extreme heat of that day made me underrate the powers of endurance of the Russian peasantry. Or it may be that many of those who write with such authority have never experienced the solitude of a great Russian plain. If I may draw another analogy from astronomy, I would liken the relations between Moscow and this farm to those between the sun and the earth. It may well be that the sun is guiding our destinies at this present moment. But it is notorious that we in England do without its rays altogether.

We reached the station in time to catch the train. It was very full, and we were obliged to travel "soft". On the way back the guide pointed out to me a few things of interest. In particular, I shall never forget the scene as we drew near to Kiev and passed over a very long bridge. The setting sun enhanced the beauty of the country-side. The guide knew English very



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well indeed, and recited: "The boy stood on the railway line" and another one about "something that looks like strawberry jam". I retorted with "the boy stood on the tramway line", and the guide guessed the last word. We were stiff and exhausted when we arrived at the station of Kiev.

I spent the evening reading newspapers. The *Izvestia* was full of the wheat problem. It was asserted that the Soviet delegation at Geneva had offered to cooperate in the setting up of quotas for each country, but that America had refused. From this it was inferred that the U.S.A. and Canada intended to start "dumping" on a gigantic scale. It was also said that Litvinov had created a sensation at Geneva. Apparently he had explained to the assembled delegates just how the crisis might be overcome, and the whole world was now bowing down to him in gratitude. There were no foreign newspapers available in Kiev, and I was very anxious to know whether this was a true picture of recent events, or whether the Soviet Government was not trying to enhance its own prestige.

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The next day I took a walk through the city. I confirmed the impressions I had already formed of its inhabitants. I saw a Polish school, and also a Polish theatre which plays regularly. I wondered whether this policy of sheltering nationalities would really bring more advantages to the Bolsheviks than the repressions across the Polish frontier, of which we had heard so much. Of course it has an undoubted moral value. But the Bolsheviks are practical people. There might come a time when they could no longer afford the risk. In Georgia they have never been so lenient. They do not want to lose Georgia. It is too valuable. But so is the Ukraine. Everywhere in the world Polish Ukrainians have been plotting and trying to stir up trouble.

I went to the Ukrainian Ethnographical Museum, and spent some very interesting time there. After that I looked in to the University, which has now been turned into an Institute of Popular Instruction. Here I obtained some very valuable information about the present system of education in the U.S.S.R. Since I returned to England I have read many books on this subject, written by experts. On every

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occasion I find that I was wrong. I still do not doubt the accuracy of the facts I ascertained in Kiev; and still less do I doubt the sound judgment of the experts. But Russia is a large and varied country, however ardently the Bolsheviki may desire to create uniformity. I have thus been warned against the danger of attempting to make "discoveries" in Russia. Anybody can do that. It is quite valueless.

One section of the Institute is reserved for Jews, and there the teaching is done exclusively in their own language. Everywhere else it is in Ukrainian. I found that the Jewish section of the University was very well attended. I cannot quote the figures for the Jewish population of the Ukraine, but I know it is very large. I wondered at the time whether this fact might not partly account for the success of the Revolution in the Ukraine.

I then went to the National Library, which is only a few yards away from the former University. I applied for admittance. Only certain students are allowed to use this library. I believe that they have to undertake to be teachers in Soviet schools. In that case they receive a certain grant for their education. Clearly it would never

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do to allow students whose principles have not been proved to be thoroughly reliable to enter the library. It contains far too many books that are not of the predetermined hue. I explained that I was a foreigner and showed my passport. After some discussion an attendant granted my request to be taken round.

I saw each of the rooms in turn, and was shown where the books are received, catalogued and placed on shelves. They have over a million books and take in one copy of every book that is published in Russia. In addition, they have a great number of foreign books. One man in the cataloguing-room was very anxious to prove to me how perfect the collection was. I named a few well-known English and French books and we found their numbers in the catalogue. I then went into the room where the very old books are kept. Here there was an atmosphere entirely different from anything that I had previously encountered in Russia. I might have been anywhere else in Europe. A man who was working at a desk came and welcomed me very warmly. What a joy he had in showing me the treasures that he produced out of shelves and

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drawers! Never shall I forget his enthusiasm over some books in parchment and wood. These he declared to be many centuries old. In particular, his delight over a signed copy of Shevchenko's poems knew no bounds.

Occasionally, in showing me some specimen, he would say that only the British Museum possessed a similar copy, as only two existed in the world. At every mention of this my opinion of the British Museum rose considerably. My thoughts flew back to that venerable edifice. I remembered the great circular reading-room with its scores of industrious students. I remembered the very, very dark gentleman who sits all day, with his hat on, at a place very near the door; and I wondered how many thousand words he had already written, since nine o'clock, on his little slips of paper. I remembered the stout Abbé who sits not far away, and his habit of snoring heavily over his book every day at about three o'clock.

“ . . . weary of days and hours  
 . . . . .  
Desires and dreams and powers  
And everything but sleep.”

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I wondered whether at that moment his head was not dropping forward in answer to that afternoon summons which so many stout Abbés before him have obeyed. But above all I wondered whether any of the inmates of the Museum had any idea that within its walls lay treasures of which copies were only to be found in the National Library of Kiev, and that those very copies were capable of bringing such joy and gladness to this kindly soul, who would otherwise most surely have been lost in the great turmoil of the Russian Revolution.

I stayed with him for nearly two hours, and he showed me a great many things. Sometimes I was left speechless with wonderment. Nevertheless, he seemed to feel that, however ignorant I might be, I was yet able to appreciate the value of his collection, and his own great interest in it. He implored me to return, and I promised him that if ever I came back to Kiev I should not fail to do so.

I returned to my hotel in the evening for a very late lunch. There I met a young German, and we conversed for some time. We decided to take a walk in the Proletarski Sad, or the

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Garden of the Proletariat. This is as well kept as possible, considering that it is the general place of recreation for the entire population of Kiev. Its central position enables it to be reached in a very few minutes from any part of the town, with the result that it is extremely crowded. There are a few swings and roundabouts for children and some pleasant walks among the trees.

My new acquaintance was very concerned about the development of the situation in Germany. He said that nobody really wanted communism there. It was far too much opposed to the general trend of German philosophy. Even Hegel had started upon an individualistic basis. But Germany could not pay her debts. As a country that depended for survival upon a voluminous export trade, she was suffering more than other countries from the recent depression. Russia had firmly refused to pay her war debts. If Germany had a communist revolution, she could do the same, and rely upon the support of Russia. It thus seemed to him that political considerations were tending to outweigh the purely social objections. Ger-

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many did not want communism, but needed the communists.

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That evening I left Kiev. My train did not start until after midnight, and I was informed that it would be impossible to get any vehicle to convey my suitcase to the station so very late. The Intourist Agency, however, possessed a car, and after supper my luggage was driven to the station. Once there, it was impossible to leave it for several hours. The waiting-room was crowded with people of all ages and both sexes. They were all poverty-stricken. Hardly any of them wore anything on their feet. The large room was so full that I all but took my own shoes off, for fear of causing any injury. All the seats were occupied. I placed my suitcase in an empty space in the middle of the room and sat on it.

I started to read a new book by Maxim Gorky. He is by far the most popular author in Russia to-day. Any writer who conforms to the Bolshevik standard becomes a member of



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the literary organisation. His works may then be sold anywhere in Russia. The number of this selected band is rapidly increasing. But the enthusiasm over Gorky surpasses all belief. There are large posters all over Moscow with the words "Our Gorky" inscribed upon them. Underneath this heading is a description of the work that he is doing to support the Revolution. When I was in Moscow, Gorky had just arrived there. An American friend whom I met invited me to the Opera, as it was known that Gorky was going that night and he was expected to receive a tremendous ovation. Unfortunately he was indisposed at the last moment and did not arrive.

Many people accuse Gorky of opportunism. They say that he only writes in favour of the Revolution in order to increase his sales, and that he never subscribed to its principles before. They add that he uses his plea of ill-health in order to live most of his time in the more comfortable capitalist world, yet without ceasing to hurl the fire of his wrath against political prisoners in Russia itself and to plead for their execution. I do not think that this charge

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is justified. Many of his books that I have read have convinced me that Gorky was a communist long before the advent of the Revolution.

About half an hour before the train left a tall and strongly built individual approached me. As I showed no sign of recognition he explained that he had seen me in the Intourist Agency. He was an American, having naturalised there some twenty years ago. He preferred, however, to talk Russian, which was his native language. We agreed to travel together. There was no room near me, so the man returned to his own suitcase and continued to sit on it.

The crowd had by now grown very much quieter. A few hours before there had been shouts and a few angry disputes. But already most of the women had fallen asleep in every conceivable posture. Some sat straight upright, as though turned to stone. Others had let their heads fall backwards on some basket or sack of vegetables, or even on the bare feet of the person behind. Most of the men smoked furiously at their short pipes. The occasional cries of infants alone disturbed the silence.

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Presently the door was flung open and an official shouted to us to get ready. In a second the whole scene was one of confusion. People snatched their belongings and made for the train. By the time I reached it all the "soft" compartments were filled with people. They had crowded themselves on the seats. Some guards arrived and yelled at them to get out. They did not understand, and some of them showed their tickets, which were for the "hard" class. Probably most of them had never been on a railway journey for years. At any rate, the large majority were illiterate and could not read what was written on the ticket. It must not be supposed that travelling is a common experience for a Russian peasant. Until recently even some quite important lines only ran one train a month. Trains are still very rare. But there was no mistaking the purport of the shouts and gesticulations of the guards. The people began to clamber down again from the train and to congregate on the platform. They were gradually herded into the right portion of the train. The officials did not seem to consider that any of this was out of the ordinary. It must have

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been just like that every night. I remembered the wonderful lines of Maria Rilke :

“Die Nacht die kam war keine ungemeine  
So gehen hunderte vorbei  
Da schlafen Hunde und da liegen Steine.  
Ach eine traurige, ach irgendeine  
Die wartet bis es wieder morgen sei.”

It was after one o'clock in the morning before we steamed out of Kiev.

My travelling companion was a very silent person. He was employed in Ford's Works at Detroit. His aged parents still remained in Russia, and he had just visited them for the first time since his naturalisation. He had been appalled to discover in what conditions they were living. When he left they had owned a whole house; but now this had to be shared with people whom his parents disliked. They had only been able to retain two rooms, which had to suffice for the father and mother and their eldest son, who was employed in Russia as a mining engineer. Altogether, he had nothing to say in praise of the Bolsheviki. The journey from America to Russia was very expensive, and he did not foresee the possibility of repeat-

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ing it for a great many years. I liked this man. He endured all the hardships of the journey without a murmur, and he never spoke a word that was not absolutely necessary. *O si sic omnes!*



We reached the frontier station of Shepetovka at about noon the next day. Unfortunately we had six hours to wait before the train took us across the Polish frontier. We soon discovered that the village was very ordinary. There were the usual scenes near the station. Eight or nine cabs were lined up, and to each of them was harnessed a horse that had more bones than flesh. During the whole of our six hours at Shepetovka I do not believe that more than one of these cabs was used, though it is true that the one in question drove off with a loud crack of his whip and a great air of importance. At some of the cottages peasants could be seen sitting or idly chatting. All this gives one the impression of complete stagnation. There is no movement in a Russian village. I remembered

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the opening scene in *Dead Souls*. A cab drives up in a small country town. Two old men gaze at it for some time in silence. They look at the wheels. One of them asks the other whether the cab is likely to reach the village of X. They both agree that it will do so. He then asks whether it will get as far as the village of Y. The other one does not think that the wheels would stand the journey to the village of Y. It seemed to me that such conversations were going on all around me in Shepetovka. We have already heard so much of what the Bolsheviks are doing to put energy into the peasants. The success that they have already achieved is phenomenal, and the methods they are adopting suggest that this will be increased in the future. But few people can realise what a tremendous task lies before them. The introduction of machines is one thing, and the enforcement of social changes is another. But their policy of mechanisation really aims at transforming a certain type of human nature that has been allowed to exist undisturbed for centuries. That is a vastly greater problem.

We discovered that the Intourist had an

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agent in Shepetovka. We crossed a small wooden bridge and knocked at his house. We were admitted, and he showed us a room where we could pass the time until the train left. The American produced some sandwiches, and we sat down with some books and newspapers. After a while the American confessed a certain uneasiness with regard to his money. This matter I am going to explain in detail, as it is extremely important for anyone who intends to travel in Russia.

The Soviet Government is obliged to obtain as much foreign money as possible in order to pay for the tremendous imports of machinery and other materials under the Five-Year Plan. This is done partly by the unpopular system of dumping. At the same time great pains are taken to ensure that no one shall take any foreign money out of the country. He may take as many paper roubles as he likes. These are worthless abroad. But he must not withdraw the coveted American dollars from Soviet territory.

Every person who enters Russia is required to produce all the money he has with him.

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This is counted, and the figure is written down on a small slip of paper. Every time he changes money in Russia he is given another chit. All this he must produce at the frontier station when he leaves. Thus if a man enters with thirty dollars, and his chits show that he changed ten dollars when he was in the country, he is allowed to take out his remaining twenty dollars and to change back enough roubles to make an additional ten. Of course it is far more probable that he will return with less money than he had when he started. But we may assume that his tour has been paid for on a separate account, and that he has succeeded in earning, or otherwise obtaining, a certain quantity of roubles. For it is only then that difficulties arise. He is now only allowed to purchase ten dollars with his money, since his chits show that he changed that amount when he was in Russia. In this way he leaves the country with thirty dollars, just as he entered with thirty. For example, if he arrived at the frontier station with enough roubles to purchase forty dollars, he would have to keep ten dollars' worth of paper roubles, and they would be useless to him.



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My American acquaintance had made a great mistake. He had lost the original scrap of paper on which was written down that he had brought a certain number of dollars into the country. He had changed his money recklessly and had kept no chits. The result was that he now possessed about seventy dollars' worth of roubles and saw no prospect of getting them changed. He asked me whether I could not help him in any way.

When I entered the country I had myself attached no importance to what I regarded as a mere formality. I had not even looked at the paper that was given to me. I thus failed to notice at the time that, when my dollars were counted, a few notes had been folded over inside, with the result that the official had written down less than I actually possessed. This caused me some concern when I discovered it a few days later. It seemed to me that I was liable to forfeit the remainder. That is to say, I should be allowed to bring back as many dollars as were written down on my paper, but I was in possession of a great many more for which no account could be given. An additional misfor-

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tune was that the notes which had been folded over happened to be five-dollar ones, though most of my money was in one-dollar notes. But in Moscow I met an Englishman whom I had known before. During dinner he declared that he had made a miscalculation about the cost of the journey. He asked if I would lend him a large sum of money. I knew that the money was now in safe hands, and was delighted at this opportunity of killing two birds with one stone. My friend was amazed at the readiness with which I complied with his request.

But this was not all. In certain hotels there is a counter near the door of the dining-room. At this counter are sold slabs of Russian chocolate and other foodstuffs. Not infrequently one leaves the dining-room in Russia with a certain feeling which suggests that the meal has been inadequate. The temptation to buy chocolate is too great. But nothing at the counter is sold for anything but foreign notes. Russian roubles are not accepted, though they are given as change. Once I bought some chocolate and handed over an American dollar. I was given a few kopecks as change. I then saw some post cards

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which I wanted to buy. But the man at the counter refused to accept as payment for them the very kopecks which he had given me less than a minute ago. He wanted another dollar. This is, of course, a very effective way of stimulating the export trade, without which the Five-Year Plan cannot be fulfilled.

The result of all this was that I found myself at Shepetovka with not more money than was marked upon my paper, but considerably less. I agreed to take over from the American engineer enough money to make up the rest, and to return it all to him as soon as we had crossed the frontier. But there still remained a few roubles for which no account could be given. These he sent back to his aged parents. We both hoped that no other foreigner in Russia would get involved in similar difficulties.

Occasionally during our wait we would make a journey to the station restaurant. We had not had a square meal since leaving Kiev. But the price of the food at Shepetovka was beyond our means. We bought a few small things, and were

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content to wait until we crossed the Polish frontier. About half an hour before the train left we took our luggage down to the station for the final customs examination. I went in first and showed my money. It seemed to me very odd that I should apparently return with exactly as much money as I had taken into the country. But the suspicions of the Soviet officials were not aroused. I wondered what they would say to the engineer when he appeared with no paper and professed to have no money whatever. He told me that they accepted the situation without surprise.

After leaving the customs-room I was told to sit in the waiting-room. In a few minutes the engineer, who had not yet been through the customs, appeared in the doorway and announced that he had discovered some cheap drink in the restaurant. I rose hastily at this news, but was immediately stopped in the doorway by officials. I was not allowed to leave the room. Gradually the other passengers began to enter, and we were kept like prisoners until the train arrived. We were then herded into the compartments between rows of officials. This

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sort of treatment does not improve a visitor's impression of the country which he is just leaving. But I do not think that many of the complaints made are justified. Soviet Russia, in her own interests, has these very strict regulations about currency, and that is obviously the only way to enforce them. Perhaps a little less incivility would not be amiss.

It was not long now before we crossed the frontier, and arrived at the small Polish station for dinner. It was quite obvious from our appearance that we had just been in Russia. A few inquisitive Poles tried to engage us in conversation. They wanted to know what it was like "over there". They said that people came back with such conflicting reports. Some said that the people in Russia were well off, while others said that they were poor; some said that they were happy, while others said that they were not; some said that the Five-Year Plan would inevitably succeed, and others that it was based upon unsound economic principles. They wanted to hear all the latest news. To me it seemed incredible that these people should be so near and yet so far; that they should live on

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the very borders of Soviet Russia and yet have no first-hand knowledge of the situation there. They said that they had lived here for many years, but that none of them had ever crossed the frontier.





